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ELLERY QUEEN'S

Mystery Magazine

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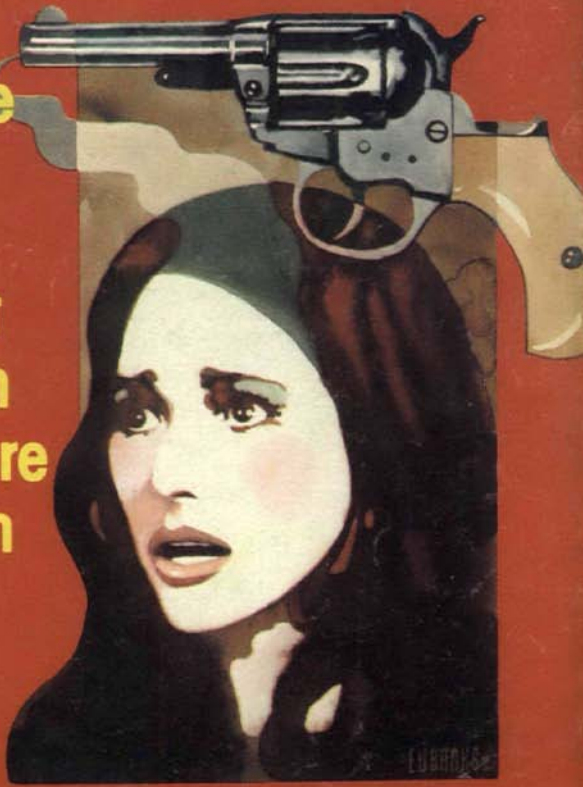

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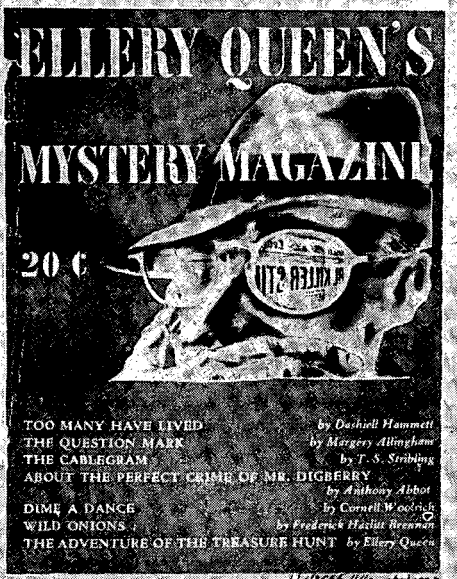
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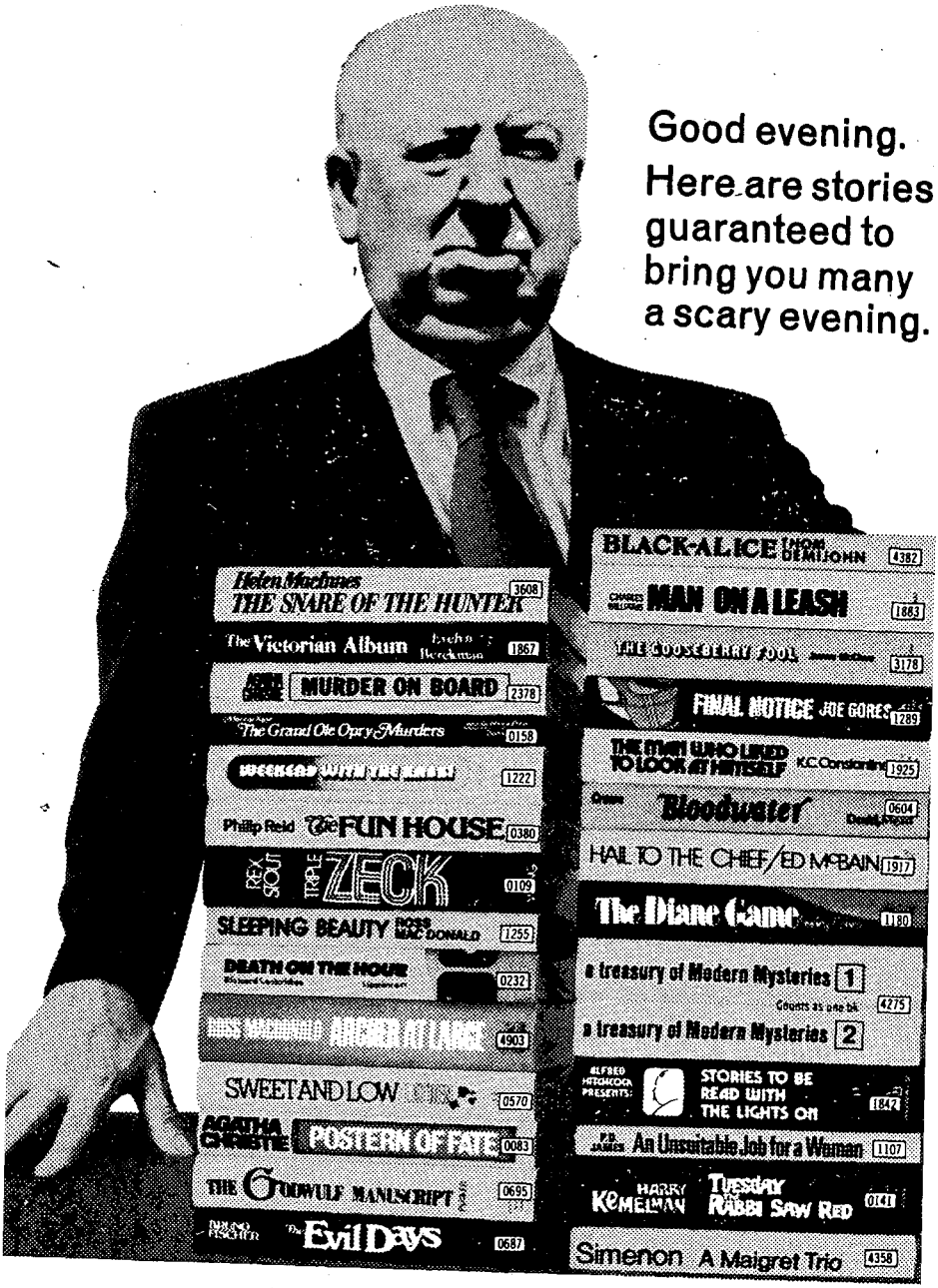
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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

THE BIG STORY	Dick Francis	7
CONFESSIONS OF AN AMERICAN CIGARETTE SMOKER	Isaac Asimov	26
DEATH AND AUNT FANCY	Edmund Crispin	42
DEPARTMENT OF PROBLEMS RESOLVED	MacLean O'Spelin	46
ROADSIDE PICKUP	Richard Laymon	60
WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND?	Michael Gilbert	65
WALKING HUBERT DOWN	John Pierce	73
STRANGE JEST	Agatha Christie	92
MURDER IN THE PANTRY	Michele Spirn	104
A FOOL ABOUT MONEY	Ngaio Marsh	114
THE LOST HEIR	Lillian de la Torre	119
HARD TIMES	Sonora Morrow	139
THE PROBLEM OF THE COVERED BRIDGE	Edward D. Hoch	140
THE JURY BOX	John Dickson Carr	137
INDEX TO VOLUME SIXTY-FOUR		161-162

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a *NEW* story by

DICK FRANCIS

first publication in the United States *(see page 59)*

Dick Francis brought a seldom used milieu to the mystery novel—horseracing in all its fascinating forms. His stories are the most authentic of their kind—and with good reason. Dick Francis knows what he's writing about—he's a former professional jockey, he became Britain's champion steeplechase rider, and for four years was the jockey for the Queen Mother.

This new story has the Kentucky Derby as its backdrop. But even more important than the racing atmosphere, the fixing and the bookmaking and the pickpocketing, even the Derby run itself, is Mr. Francis' insight into a very human being, a washed-up, chiseling turfwriter who got the biggest break in his news career at Churchill Downs . . .

THE BIG STORY

by DICK FRANCIS

When the breakfast-time Astrojet from La Guardia was still twenty minutes short of Louisville, Fred Collyer took out a block of printed forms and began to write his expenses.

Cab fare to airport, $15.

No matter that a neighbor, working out on Long Island, had given him a free ride door to door; a little imagination in the expense department earned him half as much again (untaxed, as the *Manhattan Star* paid him for the facts he came up with every week in his Monday racing column).

Refreshments on journey, he wrote, *$5.*

Entertaining for the purpose of obtaining information, $6.50.

To justify that little lot he ordered a second double bourbon from the air hostess and

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lifted it in a silent good-luck gesture to a man sleeping across the aisle, the owner of a third-rate filly that had bucked her shins two weeks ago.

Another Kentucky Derby. His mind flickered like a scratched print of an old movie over the days ahead. The same old slog out to the barns in the mornings, the same endless raking over of past form, searching for a hint of the future. The same inconclusive workouts on the track, the same slanderous rumors, same gossip, same stupid jocks, same stupid trainers shooting their damn stupid mouths off.

The bright burning enthusiasm which had carved out his syndicated byline was long gone. The lift of the spirit to the big occasion, the flair for sensing a story where no one else did, the sharp instinct which sorted truth from camouflage, all these he had had. All had left him. In their place lay plains of boredom and perpetual cynical tiredness. Instead of exclusives he nowadays gave his paper rehashes of other turfwriters' ideas, and a couple of times recently he had failed to do even that.

He was 46.

He drank.

Back in his functional New York office the Sports Editor of the *Manhattan Star* pursed his lips over Fred Collyer's account of the Everglades at Hialeah and wondered if he had been wise to send him down as usual to the Derby.

That guy, he thought regretfully, was all washed up. Too bad. Too bad he couldn't stay off the liquor. No one could drink and write, not at one and the same time. Write first, drink after; sure. Drink to excess, to stupor, maybe. But *after*.

He thought that before long he would have to let Fred go, that probably he should have started looking around for a replacement that day months back when Fred first turned up in the office too fuddled to hit the right keys on his typewriter. But that bum had had everything, he thought. A true journalist's nose for a story, and a gift for putting it across so vividly that the words jumped right off the page and kicked you in the brain.

Nowadays all that was left was a reputation and an echo; the technique still marched shakily on, but the personality behind it was drowning.

The Sports Editor shook his head over the Hialeah clipping and laid it aside. Twice in the past six weeks Fred had been incapable of writing a story at all. Each time when he had not phoned through they had

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fudged up a column in the office and stuck the Collyer name on it, but two missed deadlines were one more than forgivable. Three, and it would be all over. The management were grumbling louder than ever over the inflated expense accounts, and if they found out that in return they had twice received only sodden silence, no amount of for-old-times'-sake would save him.

I did warn him, thought the Sports Editor uneasily. I told him to be sure to turn in a good one this time. A sizzler, like he used to. I told him to make this Derby one of his greats.

Fred Collyer checked into the motel room the newspaper had reserved for him and sank three quick mid-morning stiffeners from the bottle he had brought along in his briefcase. He shoved the Sports Editor's warning to the back of his mind because he was still sure that drunk or sober he could outwrite any other commentator in the business, given a story that was worth the trouble. There just weren't any good stories around any more.

He took a taxi out to Churchill Downs. *(Cab fare, $4.50,* he wrote on the way; and paid the driver $2.75.)

With three days to go to the Derby the track looked clean, fresh, and expectant. Bright red tulips in tidy columns pointed their petals uniformly to the blue sky, and patches of green grass glowed like shampooed rugs. Without noticing them Fred Collyer took the elevator to the roof and trudged up the last windy steps to the huge glass-fronted press room which ran along the top of the stands.

Inside, a few men sat at the rows of typewriters knocking out the next day's news, and a few more stood outside on the balcony actually watching the first race, but most were engaged on the day's serious business, which was chat.

Fred Collyer bought himself a can of beer at the simple bar and carried it over to his named place, exchanging Hi-yahs with the faces he saw on the circuit from Saratoga to Hollywood Park. Living on the move in hotels, and altogether rootless since Sylvie got fed up with his absence and his drinking and took the kids back to Mom in Nebraska, he looked on racetrack press boxes as his only real home. He felt relaxed there, assured of respect. He was unaware that the admiration he had once inspired was slowly fading into tolerant pity.

He sat easily in his chair reading one of the day's duplicated news releases.

"Trainer Harbourne Cressie

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reports no heat in Pincer Movement's near fore after breezing four furlongs on the track this morning."

"No truth in rumor that Salad Bowl was running a temperature last evening, insists veterinarian John Brewer on behalf of owner Mrs. L. (Loretta) Hicks."

Marvelous, he thought sarcastically. Negative news was no news, Derby runners included.

He stayed up in the press box all afternoon, drinking beer, discussing this, that, and nothing with writers, photographers, publicists, and radio newsmen, keeping an inattentive eye on the racing on the closed-circuit television, and occasionally going out onto the balcony to look down on the anthill crowd far beneath. There was no need to struggle around down there as he used to, he thought. No need to try to see people, to interview them privately. Everything and everyone of interest came up to the press box sometime, ladling out info in spoonfed dollops.

At the end of the day he accepted a ride back to town in a colleague's Hertz car *(cab fare, $4.50),* and in the evening having laid substantial bourbon foundations in his own room before setting out, he attended the annual dinner of the Turfwriters' Association. The throng in the big reception room was pleased enough to see him, and he moved among the assortment of newsmen, trainers, jockeys, breeders, owners and wives and girl friends like a fish in his own home pond. Automatically before dinner he put away four doubles on the rocks, and through the food and the lengthy speeches afterward kept up a steady intake. At half-past eleven, when he tried to leave the table, he couldn't control his legs.

It surprised him. Sitting down, he had not been aware of being drunk. His tongue still worked as well as most around him, and to himself his thoughts seemed perfectly well organized. But his legs buckled as he put his weight on them, and he returned to his seat with a thump. It was considerably later, when the huge room had almost emptied as the guests went home, that he managed to summon enough strength to stand up.

"Guess I took a skinful," he murmured, smiling to himself in self-excuse.

Holding onto the backs of chairs and at intervals leaning against the wall, he weaved his way to the door. From there he blundered out into the passage and forward to the lobby, and from there, looking as if he

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were climbing imaginary steps, out into the night through the swinging glass doors.

The cool May evening air made things much worse. The earth seemed literally to be turning beneath his feet. He listed sideways into a half circle and, instead of moving forward to the parked cars and waiting taxis, staggered head-on into the dark brick front of the wall flanking the entrance. The impact hurt him and confused him further. He put both his hands flat on the rough surface in front of him and laid his face on it, and couldn't work out where he was.

Marius Tollman and Piper Boles had not seen Fred Collyer leave ahead of them. They strolled together along the same route making the ordinary social phrases and gestures of people who had just come together by chance at the end of an evening, and gave no impression at all that they had been eyeing each other meaningfully across the room for hours, and thinking almost exclusively about the conversation which lay ahead.

In a country with legalized bookmaking Marius Tollman might have grown up a respectable law-abiding citizen. As it was, his natural aptitude and only talent had led him into a lifetime of quick footwork which would have done credit to Muhammad Ali. Through the simple expedient of standing bets for the future racing authorities while they were still young enough to be foolish, he remained unpersecuted by them once they reached status and power; and the one sort of winner old crafty Marius could spot better even than horses was the colt heading for the boardroom.

The two men went through the glass doors and stopped just outside with the light from the lobby shining full upon them. Marius never drew people into corners, believing it looked too suspicious.

"Did you get the boys to go along, then?" he asked, standing on his heels with his hands in his pockets and his paunch oozing over his belt.

Piper Boles slowly lit a cigarette, glanced around casually at the star dotted sky, and sucked comforting smoke into his lungs.

"Yeah," he said.

"So who's elected?"

"Amberezzio."

"No," Marius protested. "He's not good enough."

Piper Boles drew deep on his cigarette. He was hungry. One hundred and eleven pounds to make tomorrow, and only a five-ounce steak in his belly.

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He resented fat people, particularly rich fat people. He was putting away his own small store of fat in real estate and growth bonds, but at 38 the physical struggle was near to defeating him. He couldn't face many more years of starvation, finding it worse as his body aged. A sense of urgency had lately led him to consider ways of making a quick $10,000 that once he would have sneered at.

He said, "He's straight. It'll have to be him."

Marius thought it over, not liking it, but finally nodded.

"All right, then. Amberezzio."

Piper Boles nodded, and prepared to move away. It didn't do for a jockey to be seen too long with Marius Tollman, not if he wanted to go on riding second string for the prestigious Somerset Farms, which he most assuredly did.

Marius saw the impulse and said smoothly, "Did you give any thought to a diversion on Crinkle Cut?"

Piper Boles hesitated.

"It'll cost you," he said.

"Sure," Marius agreed easily. "How about another thousand, on top?"

"Used bills. Half before."

"Sure."

Piper Boles shrugged off his conscience, tossed out the last of his integrity.

"Okay," he said, and sauntered away to his car as if all his nerves weren't stretched and screaming.

Fred Collyer had heard every word, and he knew, without having to look, that one of the voices was Marius Tollman's. Impossible for anyone long in the racing game not to recognize that wheezy Boston accent. He understood that Marius had been fixing up a swindle and also that a good little swindle would fill his column nicely. He thought fuzzily that it was necessary to know who Marius had been talking to, and that as the voices had been behind him he had better turn round and find out.

Time however was disjointed for him, and when he pushed himself off the wall and made an effort to focus in the right direction, both men had gone.

"Damn," he said aloud to the empty night, and another late homegoer, leaving the hotel, took him compassionately by the elbow and led him to a taxi. He made it safely back to his own room before he passed out.

Since leaving La Guardia that morning he had drunk six beers, four brandies, one double Scotch (by mistake), and nearly three fifths of bourbon.

He woke at eleven the next morning, and couldn't believe

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it. He stared at the bedside clock.

Eleven.

He had missed the barns and the whole morning merry-go-round on the track. A shiver chilled him at that first realization, but there was worse to come.

When he tried to sit up, the room whirled and his head thumped like a piledriver. When he stripped back the sheet, he found he had been sleeping in bed fully clothed with his shoes on. When he tried to remember how he had returned the previous evening, he could not do so.

He tottered into the bathroom. His face looked back at him like a nightmare from the mirror, wrinkled and red-eyed, ten years older overnight. Hungover he had been any number of times, but this felt like no ordinary morning-after. A sense of irretrievable disaster hovered somewhere behind the acute physical misery of his head and stomach, but it was not until he had taken off his coat and shirt and pants, and scraped off his shoes, and lain down again weakly on the crumpled bed, that he discovered its nature.

Then he realized with a jolt that not only had he no recollection of the journey back to his motel, he could recall practically nothing of the entire evening. Snatches of conversation from the first hour came back to him, and he remembered sitting at table between a cross old writer from the *Baltimore Sun* and an earnest woman breeder from Lexington, neither of whom he liked; but an uninterrupted blank started from halfway through the fried chicken.

He had heard of alcoholic blackouts, but supposed they only happened to alcoholics; and he, Fred Collyer, was not one of those. Of course, he would concede that he did drink a little. Well, a lot, then. But he could stop any time he liked. Naturally he could.

He lay on the bed and sweated, facing the stark thought that one blackout might lead to another, until blackouts gave way to pink panthers climbing the walls. The Sports Editor's warning came back with a bang, and for the first time, uncomfortably remembering the two times he had missed his column, he felt a shade of anxiety about his job.

Within five minutes he had reassured himself that they would never fire Fred Collyer, but all the same he would for the paper's sake lay off the drink until after he had written his piece on the Derby. This resolve gave him a glowing feel-

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ing of selfless virtue, which at least helped him through the shivering fits and pulsating headaches of an extremely wretched day.

Out at Churchill Downs three other men were just as worried. Piper Boles kicked his horse forward into the starting stalls and worried about what George Highbury, the Somerset Farms' trainer, had said when he went to scale at two pounds overweight. George Highbury thought himself superior to all jocks and spoke to them curtly, win or lose.

"Don't give me that rot," he said to Boles's excuses. "You went to the Turfwriters' Dinner last night, what do you expect?"

Piper Boles looked bleakly back over his hungry evening with its single martini and said he'd had a session in the sweat box that morning.

Highbury scowled. "You keep your fat backside away from the table tonight and tomorrow if you want to make Crinkle Cut in the Derby."

Piper Boles badly needed to ride Crinkle Cut in the Derby. He nodded meekly to Highbury with downcast eyes, and swung unhappily into the saddle.

Instead of bracing him, the threat of losing the ride on Crinkle Cut took the edge off his concentration, so that he came out of the stalls slowly, streaked the first quarter too fast to reach third place, swung wide at the bend and lost his stride straightening out. He finished sixth. He was a totally experienced jockey of above average ability. It was not one of his days.

In the grandstand Marius Tollman put down his binoculars, shaking his head and clicking his tongue. If Piper Boles couldn't ride a better race than that when he was supposed to be trying to win, what sort of damn hash would he make of losing on Crinkle Cut?

Marius thought about the $10,000 he was staking on Saturday's little caper. He had not yet decided whether to tip off certain guys in organized crime, in which case they would cover the stake at no risk to himself, or to gamble on the bigger profit of going it alone. He lowered his wheezy bulk onto his seat and worried about the ease with which a fixed race could unfix itself.

Blisters Schultz worried about the state of his trade, which was suffering a severe recession.

Blisters Schultz picked pockets for a living, and was fed up with credit cards. In the old days, when he'd learned the

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skill at his grandfather's knee, men carried their billfolds in their rear pants' pockets, neatly outlined for all the world to see. Nowadays all these smash-and-grab muggers had ruined the market; few people carried more than a handful of dollars around with them, and those that did tended to divide it into two portions, with the heavy dough hidden away beneath zippers.

Fifty-three years Blisters had survived, 45 of them by stealing. Several shortish sessions behind bars had been regarded as bad luck, but not as a good reason for not nicking the first wallet he saw when he got out. He had tried to go straight once, but he hadn't liked it—couldn't face the regular hours and the awful feeling of working. After six weeks he had left his well paid job and gone back thankfully to insecurity. He felt happier stealing $2 than earning ten.

For the best haul at the races you either had to spot the big wads before they were gambled away, or follow a big winner away from the payout window. In either case, it meant hanging around the parimutuel with your eyes open. The trouble was, too many racetrack cops had cottoned to this *modus op,* and were apt to stand around looking at people who were just standing there looking.

Blisters had had a bad week. The most promisingly fat wallet had proved, after half an hour's careful stalking, to contain little money but a lot in pornography. Blisters, having a weak sex drive, was disgusted on both counts.

For his first two days' labor he had only $23 to show, and five of these he had found on a stairway. His meager room in Louisville was costing him $8 a night, and with transportation and eating to take into account, he reckoned he'd have to clear $300 to make the trip worthwhile.

Always an optimist, he brightened at the thought of Derby Day. The pickings would certainly be easier once the real crowd arrived.

Fred Collyer's private Prohibition lasted intact through Friday. Feeling better when he woke, he cabbed out to Churchill Downs at 7:30, writing his expenses on the way. They included many mythical items for the previous day, on the basis that it was better for the office not to know he had been paralytic on Wednesday night. He upped the inflated total a few more dollars; after all, bourbon was expensive, and he would be off the wagon by Sunday.

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The initial shock of the blackout had worn off, because during his day in bed he had remembered bits and pieces which he was certain were later in time than the fried chicken. The journey from dinner to bed was still a blank, but the blank had stopped frightening him. At times he felt there was something vital about it he ought to remember, but he persuaded himself that if it had been really important, he wouldn't have forgotten.

Out by the barns the groups of reporters had already formed round the trainers of the most fancied Derby runners. Fred Collyer sauntered to the outskirts of Harbourne Cressie, and his colleagues made room for him with no reference to his previous day's absence. It reassured him: whatever he had done on Wednesday night, it couldn't have been scandalous.

The notebooks were out. Harbourne Cressie, long practised and fond of publicity, paused between every sentence to give time for all to be written down.

"Pincer Movement ate well last evening and is calm and cool this A.M. On the book we should hold Salad Bowl, unless the track is sloppy by Saturday."

Smiles all round. The sky blue, the forecast fair.

Fred Collyer listened without attention. He'd heard it all before. They'd all heard it all before. And who the hell cared?

In a rival group two barns away the trainer of Salad Bowl was saying his colt had the beating of Pincer Movement on the Hialeah form, and could run on any going, sloppy or not.

George Highbury attracted fewer newsmen, as he hadn't much to say about Crinkle Cut. The three-year-old had been beaten by both Pincer Movement and Salad Bowl on separate occasions, and was not expected to reverse things.

On Friday afternoon Fred Collyer spent his time up in the press room and manfully refused a couple of free beers. *(Entertaining various owners at track, $22.)*

Piper Boles rode a hard finish in the sixth race, lost by a short head, and almost passed out from hunger-induced weakness in the jocks' room afterward. George Highbury, unaware of this, merely noted sourly that Boles had made the weight and confirmed that he would ride Crinkle Cut in the big race tomorrow.

Various friends of Piper Boles, supporting him toward a daybed, asked anxiously in his ear whether tomorrow's scheme was still on. Piper Boles nod-

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ded. "Sure," he said faintly. "All the way."

Marius Tollman was relieved to see Boles riding better, but decided anyway to hedge his bet by letting the syndicate in on the action.

Blisters Schultz lifted two billfolds, containing respectively $14 and $22. He lost ten of them backing a certainty in the last race.

Pincer Movement, Salad Bowl, and Crinkle Cut, guarded by uniformed men with guns at their waists, looked over the stable doors and with small quivers in their tuned-up muscles watched other horses go out to the track. All three could have chosen to go too. All three knew well enough what the trumpet was sounding for, on the other side.

Saturday morning, fine and clear.

Crowds in their thousands converged on Churchill Downs. Eager, expectant, chattering, dressed in bright colors and buying mint juleps in takeaway souvenir glasses, they poured through the gates and over the infield, reading the latest sports columns on Pincer Movement versus Salad Bowl, and dreaming of picking outsiders that came up at 50 to 1.

Blisters Schultz had scraped together just enough to pay his motel bill, but self-esteem depended on better luck with the hoists. His small lined face with its busy eyes wore a look near to desperation, and the long predatory fingers clenched and unclenched convulsively in his pockets.

Piper Boles, with 126 to do on Crinkle Cut, allowed himself an egg for breakfast and decided to buy property bonds with the five hundred in used notes which had been delivered by hand the previous evening, and with the gains (both legal and illegal) he should add to them that day. If he cleaned up safely that afternoon, he thought, there was no obvious reason why he shouldn't set up the same scheme again, even after he had retired from riding. He hardly noticed the shift in his mind from reluctant dishonesty to habitual fraud.

Marius Tollman spent the morning telephoning to various acquaintances, offering profit. His offers were accepted. Marius Tollman felt a load lift from his spirits and with a spring in his step took his 260 pounds downtown where a careful gentleman counted out $10,000 in untraceable notes. Marius Tollman gave him a receipt, properly signed. Business was business.

Fred Collyer wanted a drink. One, he thought, wouldn't hurt.

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It would pep him up a bit, put him on his toes. One little drink in the morning would certainly not stop him writing a punchy piece that evening. *The Star* couldn't possibly frown on just *one* drink before he went to the races, especially not as he had managed to keep clear of the bar the previous evening by going to bed at nine. His abstinence had involved a great effort of will; it would be right to reward such virtue with just one drink.

He had, however, finished on Wednesday night the bottle he had brought with him to Louisville. He fished out his wallet to check how much he had in it: $53, plenty after expenses to cover a fresh bottle for later as well as a quick one in the bar before he left.

He went downstairs. In the lobby his colleague Clay Petrovitch again offered a free ride in his Hertz car to Churchill Downs, so he decided he could postpone his one drink for half an hour. He gave himself little mental pats on the back all the way to the racetrack.

Blisters Schultz, circulating among the clusters of people at the rear of the grandstand, saw Marius Tollman going by in the sunshine, leaning backward to support the weight in front and wheezing in the growing heat.

Blisters Schultz licked his lips. He knew the fat man by sight, knew that somewhere around that gross body might be stacked enough bread to see him through the summer. Marius Tollman would never come to the Derby with empty pockets.

Two thoughts made Blisters hesitate as he slid like an eel in the fat man's wake. The first was that Tollman was too old a hand to let himself be robbed. The second, that he was known to have friends in organized places, and if Tollman was carrying organization money Blisters wasn't going to burn his fingers by stealing it, which was how he got his nickname in the first place.

Regretfully Blisters peeled off from the quarry, and returned to the throng in the comforting shadows under the grandstand.

At 12:17 he infiltrated a close-packed bunch of people waiting for an elevator.

At 12:18 he stole Fred Collyer's wallet.

Marius Tollman carried his money in cunning underarm pockets which he clamped to his sides in a crowd, for fear of pickpockets. When the time was due he would visit as many different selling windows as possible, inconspicuously distributing the stake. He would

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give Piper Boles almost half of the tickets (along with the second $500 in used notes), and keep the other half for himself.

A nice tidy little killing, he thought complacently. And no reason why he shouldn't set it up some time again.

He bought a mint julep and smiled kindly at a girl showing more bosom than bashfulness.

The sun stoked up the day. The preliminaries rolled over one by one with waves of cheering, each hard-ridden finish merely a sideshow attending on the big one—the Derby, the roses, the climax, the ninth race.

In the jocks' room Piper Boles had changed into the silks for Crinkle Cut and began to sweat. The nearer he came to the race the more he wished it was an ordinary Derby Day like any other. He steadied his nerves by reading the *Financial Times.*

Fred Collyer discovered the loss of his wallet upstairs in the press box when he tried to pay for a beer. He cursed, searched all his pockets, turned the press box upside down, got the keys of the Hertz car from Clay Petrovitch and trailed all the way back to the car park.

After a fruitless search there he strode furiously back to the grandstands, violently throttling in his mind the stinking bum who had stolen his money. He guessed it had been an old hand, an old man, even. The new vicious young lot relied on muscle, not skill.

His practical problems were not too great. He needed little cash. Clay Petrovitch was taking him back to town, the motel bill was going direct to the *Manhattan Star,* and his plane ticket was safely lying on the chest of drawers in his bedroom. He could borrow twenty bucks or so, maybe, from Clay or others in the press box, to cover essentials.

Going up in the elevator he thought that the loss of his money was like a sign from heaven; no money, no drink.

Blisters Schultz kept Fred Collyer sober the whole afternoon.

Pincer Movement, Salad Bowl, and Crinkle Cut were led from their barns, into the tunnel under the cars and crowds, and out again onto the track in front of the grandstands. They walked loosely, casually, used to the limelight but knowing from experience that this was only a foretaste. The first sight of the day's princes galvanized the crowds toward the parimutuel window like shoals of multicolored fish.

Piper Boles walked out with the other jockeys toward the

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wire-meshed enclosure where horses, trainers, and owners stood in a group in each stall. He had begun to suffer from a feeling of detachment and unreality; he could not believe that he, a basically honest jockey, was about to make a hash of the Kentucky Derby.

George Highbury repeated for about the fortieth time the tactics they had agreed on. Piper Boles nodded seriously, as if he had every intention of carrying them out. He actually heard scarcely a word; and he was deaf also to the massed bands and the singing when the Derby runners were led out to the track. *My Old Kentucky Home* swelled the emotions of a multitude and brought out a flutter of eye-wiping handkerchiefs, but in Piper Boles they raised not a blink.

Through the parade, the canter down, the circling round, and even into the starting stalls, the detachment persisted. Only then, with the tension showing plain on the faces of the other riders, did he click back to realization. His heart rate nearly doubled and energy flooded into his brain.

Now, he thought. It is now, in the next half minute, that I earn myself $1,000 and after that, the rest.

He pulled down his goggles and gathered his reins and his whip. He had Pincer Movement on his right and Salad Bowl on his left, and when the stalls sprang open he went out between them in a rush, tipping his weight instantly forward over the withers and standing in the stirrups with his head almost as far forward as Crinkle Cut's.

All along past the stands the first time he concentrated on staying in the center of the main bunch, as unnoticeable as possible, and round the top bend he was still there, sitting quiet and doing nothing very much. But down the backstretch, lying about tenth in a field of 26, he earned his $10,000.

No one except Piper Boles ever knew what really happened; only he knew that he'd shortened his left rein with a sharp turn of his wrist and squeezed Crinkle Cut's ribs with his right foot. The fast galloping horse obeyed these directions, veered abruptly left, and crashed into the horse beside him.

The horse beside him was still Salad Bowl. Under the impact Salad Bowl cannoned into the horse on his own left, rocked back, stumbled, lost his footing entirely, and fell. The two horses on his tail fell over him.

Piper Boles didn't look back.

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The swerve and collision had lost him several places which Crinkle Cut at the best of times would have been unable to make up. He rode the rest of the race strictly according to his instructions, finishing flat out in twelfth place.

Of the 140,000 spectators at Churchill Downs only a handful had had a clear view of the disaster on the far side of the track. The buildings in the infield, and the milling crowds filling all its farthest areas, had hidden the crash from nearly all standing at ground level and from most in the grandstands. Only the press, high up, had seen. They sent out urgent fact-finders and buzzed like a stirred-up beehive.

Fred Collyer, out on the balcony, watched the photographers running to immortalize Pincer Movement and reflected sourly that none of them would take closeup pictures of the second favorite, Salad Bowl, down on the dirt. He watched the horseshoe of dark red roses being draped over the winner and the triumphal presentation of the trophies, and then went inside for the rerun of the race on television. They showed the Salad Bowl incident forward, backward, and sideways, and then jerked it through slowly in a series of stills.

"See that," said Clay Petrovitch, pointing at the screen over Fred Collyer's shoulder. "It was Crinkle Cut caused it. You can see him crash into Salad Bowl . . . there! . . . Crinkle Cut, that's the joker in the pack."

Fred Collyer strolled over to his place, sat down, and stared at his typewriter. Crinkle Cut. He knew something about Crinkle Cut. He thought intensely for five minutes, but he couldn't remember what he knew.

Details and quotes came up to the press box. All fallen jocks shaken but unhurt, all horses ditto; stewards in a tizzy, making instant enquiries and rerunning the patrol camera film over and over. Suspension for Piper Boles considered unlikely, as blind eye usually turned to rough riding in the Derby. Piper Boles had gone on record as saying "Crinkle Cut just suddenly swerved. I didn't expect it and couldn't prevent him bumping Salad Bowl." Large numbers of people believed him.

Fred Collyer thought he might as well get a few pars down on paper; it would bring the first drink nearer, and boy how he needed that drink! With an ear open for fresher information he tapped out a blow-by-blow I-was-there account of an incident he had hardly seen. When he began to read it

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through, he saw that the first words he had written were: "The diversion on Crinkle Cut stole the post-race scene . . ."

Diversion on Crinkle Cut? He hadn't meant to write that . . . or not exactly. He frowned. And there were other words in his mind, just as stupid. He put his hands on the keys and tapped them out.

"It'll cost you . . . a thousand in used notes . . . half before."

He stared at what he had written. He had made it up, he must have. Or dreamed it. One or the other.

A dream. That was it. He remembered. He had had a dream about two men planning a fixed race, and one of them had been Marius Tollman, wheezing away about a diversion on Crinkle Cut.

Fred Collyer relaxed and smiled at the thought, and the next minute knew quite suddenly that it hadn't been a dream at all. He had heard Marius Tollman and Piper Boles planning a diversion on Crinkle Cut, and he had forgotten because he'd been drunk. Well, he reassured himself uneasily, no harm done; he had remembered now, hadn't he?

No, he hadn't. If Crinkle Cut was a diversion, what was he a diversion *from?* Perhaps if he waited a bit, he would find he knew that too. . .

Blisters Schultz spent Fred Collyer's money on two hot dogs, one mint julep, and five losing bets. On the winning side he had harvested three more billfolds and a woman's purse: total haul, $94. Gloomily he decided to call it a day and not come back next year.

Marius Tollman lumbered busily from window to window of the parimutuel and the stewards asked to see the jockeys involved in the Salad Bowl pile-up.

The crowds, hot, tired, and frayed at the edges, began to leave in the yellowing sunshine. The bands marched away. The stalls which sold souvenirs packed up their wares. Pincer Movement had his picture taken for the thousandth time, and the runners for the tenth, last, and least interesting race of the day walked over from the barns.

Piper Boles was waiting outside the stewards' room for a summons inside, but Marius Tollman used the highest class messengers, and the package he entrusted was safely delivered. Piper Boles nodded, slipped it into his pocket, and gave the stewards a performance worthy of Hollywood.

Fred Collyer put his head in his hands, trying to remember. A drink, he thought, might

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help. Diversion. Crinkle Cut. Amberezzio.

He sat up sharply. Amberezzio. And what the hell did that mean? *It has to be Amberezzio.*

"Clay," he said, leaning back over his chair. "Do you know of a horse called Amberezzio?"

Clay Petrovitch shook his bald head. "Never heard of it."

Fred Collyer called to several others through the hubbub, "Know of a horse called Amberezzio?" And finally he got an answer. "Amberezzio isn't a horse, he's an apprentice."

"It has to be Amberezzio. He's straight."

Fred Collyer knocked his chair over as he stood up. They had already called one minute to post time on the last race.

"Lend me twenty bucks, there's a pal," he said to Clay.

Clay, knowing about the lost wallet, amiably agreed and slowly began to bring out his money.

"Hurry," Fred Collyer said urgently.

"Okay, okay." He handed over $20 and turned back to his own typewriter.

Fred Collyer grabbed his racecard and pushed through the post-Derby chatter to the parimutuel window farther along the press floor. He flipped the pages . . . Tenth race, Homeward Bound, claiming race, eight runners . . . His eye skimmed down the list and found what he sought.

Philip Amberezzio, riding a horse Fred Collyer had never heard of.

"Twenty on the nose, number six," he said quickly, and received his ticket seconds before the window shut. Trembling slightly, he pushed back through the crowd, out onto the balcony. He was the only reporter watching the race.

Those jocks did it beautifully, he thought in admiration. Artistic. You wouldn't have known if you hadn't known. They bunched him in and shepherded him along, and then at the perfect moment gave him a suddenly clear opening. Amberezzio won by half a length, with all the others waving their whips as if beating the last inch out of their mounts.

Fred Collyer laughed. That poor little so-and-so probably thought he was a hell of a fellow, bringing home a complete outsider with all the big boys baying at his heels.

He went back inside the press box and found everyone's attention directed toward Harbourne Cressie, who had brought with him the owner and jockey of Pincer Movement. Fred Collyer dutifully took down enough quotes to cover

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the subject, but his mind was on the other story, the big one, the gift.

It would need careful handling, he thought. It would need the very best he could do, as he would have to be careful not to make direct accusations while leaving it perfectly clear that an investigation was necessary. His old instincts partially reawoke. He was even excited. He would write his piece in the quiet and privacy of his own room in the motel. Couldn't do it here on the track with every turfwriter in the world looking over his shoulder.

Down in the jockeys' changing room Piper Boles quietly distributed the parimutuel tickets which Marius Tollman had delivered: $500 worth to each of the seven "unsuccessful" riders in the tenth race, and $1,000 worth to himself. Each jockey subsequently asked a wife or girl friend to collect the winnings and several of these would have made easy prey for Blisters Schultz, had he not already started home.

Marius Tollman's money had shortened the odds on Amberezzio, but he was still returned at 12 to 1. Marius Tollman wheezed and puffed from payout window to payout window, collecting his winnings bit by bit. He hadn't room for all the cash in the underarm pockets and finally stowed some casually in more accessible spots. Too bad for Blisters Schultz.

Fred Collyer collected a fistful of winnings and repaid the $20 to Clay Petrovitch.

"If you had a hot tip, you might have passed it on," grumbled Petrovitch, thinking of all the expenses old Fred would undoubtedly claim for his free rides to the track.

"It wasn't a tip, just a hunch." He couldn't tell Clay what the hunch was, as he wrote for a rival paper. "I'll buy you a drink on the way home."

"I should damn well think so."

Fred Collyer immediately regretted his offer, which had been instinctive. He remembered that he had not intended to drink until after he had written. Still, perhaps one . . . And he did need a drink very badly. It seemed a century since his last, on Wednesday night.

They left together, walking out with the remains of the crowd. The track looked battered and bedraggled at the end of the day; the scarlet petals of the tulips lay on the ground, leaving rows of naked pistils sticking forlornly up, and the bright rugs of grass were dusty gray and covered with litter. Fred Collyer thought only

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of the dough in his pocket and the story in his head, and both of them gave him a nice warm glow.

A drink to celebrate, he thought. Buy Clay a thank-you drink, and maybe perhaps just one more to celebrate. It wasn't often, after all, that things fell his way so miraculously.

They stopped for the drink. The first double swept through Fred Collyer's veins like fire through a parched forest. The second made him feel great.

"Time to go," he said to Clay. "I've got my piece to write."

"Just one more," Clay said. "This one's on me."

"Better not."

He felt virtuous.

"Oh, come on," Clay said, and ordered. With the faintest of misgivings Fred Collyer sank his third; but couldn't he still outwrite every racing man in the business? Of course he could.

They left after the third. Fred Collyer bought a fifth of bourbon for later, when he had finished his story. Back in his own room he took just the merest swig from it before he sat down to write.

The words wouldn't come. He screwed up six attempts and poured some bourbon into a glass.

Marius Tollman, Crinkle Cut, Piper Boles, Amberezzio . . . It wasn't all that simple.

He took a drink. He didn't seem to be able to help it.

The Sports Editor would give him a raise for a story like this, or at least there would be no more quibbling about expenses.

He took a drink.

Piper Boles had earned himself $1,000 for crashing into Salad Bowl. Now how the hell did you write that without being sued for libel?

He took a drink.

The jockeys in the tenth race had conspired to let the only straight one among them win. How in hell could you say that?

He took a drink.

The stewards and the press had had all their attention channeled toward the crash in the Derby and had virtually ignored the tenth race. The stewards wouldn't thank him for pointing it out.

He took another drink. And another. And more.

His deadline for telephoning his story to the office was ten o'clock the following morning. When that hour struck he was asleep and snoring, fully dressed, on his bed. The empty bourbon bottle lay on the floor beside him, and his winnings, which he had tried to count, lay scattered over his chest.

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Let us remind you of three of Sherlock Holmes's pithy sayings. In "The Boscombe Valley Mystery," Holmes reminded Watson: "You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles." In A STUDY IN SCARLET, *Holmes remarked sententiously (A. Conan Doyle's own adverb): "To a great mind, nothing is little." And in* THE SIGN OF FOUR, *Holmes made what is probably his most enduring pronouncement—the precept that "when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains,* however improbable, *must be the truth."*

Now, may we suggest that you put them all together while you are reading Isaac Asimov's newest tale of the Black Widowers Club—a fascinating study of the importance of trifles in the fine art of deduction and induction. And let us echo Holmes again, this time from THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES: *"You know my methods. Apply them!" Apply them, indeed! . . .*

CONFESSIONS OF AN AMERICAN CIGARETTE SMOKER

by ISAAC ASIMOV

James Drake, the organic chemist, was by no means the only smoker among the small membership of the Black Widowers Club, but he certainly made the greatest single contribution to the pall that commonly hovered over the monthly banquets of that august body.

It was perhaps for that reason that the dour-faced code expert, Thomas Trumbull, arriving toward the end of the cocktail hour, and having unparched himself with a Scotch and soda that had been handed him deftly and without delay by the invaluable Henry, hunched his lapel ostentati-

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ously in Drake's direction.

"What's that?" asked Drake, squinting through the smoke of his cigarette.

"Why don't you read it and find out?" said Trumbull with somewhat more than his usual savagery. "If the nicotine has left you any eyesight with which to read, that is."

Trumbull's lapel bore a button which read: *Thank you for not smoking.*

Drake, having peered at it thoughtfully, puffed a mouthful of smoke in its direction, and said, "You're welcome. Always glad to oblige."

Trumbull said, "By God, I'm a member of the most oppressed minority in the world. The nonsmoker has no rights at all! Good Lord, don't I have any claim to a measure of reasonably clean and unpolluted air?"

Emmanuel Rubin the fiction writer drifted toward them. His sparse and straggly beard lifted upward—a sure sign that he was about to pontificate—and his eyes blinked owlishly behind the magnifying thickness of his glasses.

"If you live in New York," he said, "you inhale, in automobile exhaust alone, the equivalent of two packs of cigarettes a day, so what's the difference?" And he ostentatiously lit a cigarette.

"All the more reason why I don't want any more on top of the exhaust I breathe," said Trumbull, scowling.

"Don't tell me," said Drake in his softly hoarse voice, "that you believe this hogwash about—"

"Yes, I believe it," snapped Trumbull. "If you want to risk heart attacks, emphysema, and lung cancer, that's *your* business. I wouldn't interfere with your pleasure for the world if you want to do it off in a closed room somewhere. But why the hell should *I* breathe your foul smoke and run the risk of disease so that you might have your perverse—"

He broke off since Drake, who was visibly attempting not to, had one of his not-too-infrequent coughing spells.

Trumbull looked pleased. "Happy coughing," he said. "When was the last time you could breathe freely?"

Roger Halsted, the mathematician, who occasionally smoked, but was not doing so at the moment, said, with the mild stutter with which he was sometimes afflicted, "Why are you so upset, Tom? What makes this meeting different from any other?"

"Nothing at all, but I've had enough! Every time I come home after an evening with you smoldering garbage piles, my clothes smell and I have to fumigate them."

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"What I think," said Drake, "is that he found that button when he was reaching into a subway trash can for a newspaper, and it's made a missionary out of him."

"I feel like a missionary," said Trumbull. "I would like to push a law through Congress that would place tobacco in the same category with marijuana and hashish. By God, the evidence for the physiological damage caused by tobacco is infinitely stronger than for any damage caused by marijuana."

Geoffrey Avalon, the patent attorney, always sensitive to any reference to his own profession, stared down austerely from his seventy-four inches and said, "I would not advise another law legislating morality. Some of the finest men in history have tried to reform the world by passing laws against bad habits, and there is no record of a single one of them working. I'm old enough to remember Prohibition in this country."

Trumbull said, "You smoke a pipe. You're an interested party. Am I the only nonsmoker here?"

"I don't smoke," said artist Mario Gonzalo, raising his voice. He was in another corner, talking to the guest of the evening.

"All right then," said Trumbull. "Come here, Mario. You're host for the evening. Set up a No Smoking rule."

"Out of order. Out of order," said Rubin heatedly. "The host can only legislate on Black Widowers procedures, not on private morality. He can't order the members to take off their clothes, or to stand on their heads and whistle Dixie, or to stop smoking—or to start smoking, for that matter."

"It could be done," said Halsted gently, "if the host proposed the measure and put it to a vote, but the smokers are four to two against you, Tom."

"Wait a minute," said Trumbull. "There's Henry. He's really a member. What do you say, Henry?"

Henry, the perennial waiter at the Black Widowers banquets, had nearly completed setting the table. Now he lifted his smooth and unwrinkled face which, as always, belied the fact that he was a sexagenarian, and said, "I do not myself smoke and would welcome a ban on smoking, but I do not demand it."

"Even if he did," said Rubin, "it would still be four to three, *still* a majority on the side of vice."

"How about the guest?" said Trumbull doggedly. "Mr.—?"

"Hilary Evans," said Avalon. He made it his business never

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to forget a guest's name, at least for the evening of the dinner.

Trumbull said, "Where do you stand on smoking, Mr. Evans?"

Hilary Evans was short and tubby, with cheeks that were plump, pink, and smooth. His mouth was small and his eyes were quick-moving behind the lightly tinted lenses of his metal-rimmed spectacles. His hair, surprisingly dark in view of the lightness of his complexion, lay back smoothly. He might have been in his middle forties.

He said, in a tenor voice, "I smoke occasionally and do not often mind if others do, but I have current reasons for being in sympathy with you, sir. Smoking has been the occasion for my present misery."

Trumbull, one eye nearly closing as he lifted the side of his mouth in a snarl, looked as though he would have pressed the matter further, but Rubin said at once, "Five to three. Issue settled," and Henry imperturbably announced that the dinner was served.

Trumbull scrambled to get the seat next to Gonzalo, the other nonsmoker, and asked him in an undertone, "Who is this Evans?"

Gonzalo said, "He's personnel manager for a firm in whose advertising campaign I was involved. He interviewed me and even though he's rather a strange guy, we got along. I thought he might be interesting."

"I hope so," said Trumbull, "though I don't think much of a guy who votes with the enemy even though he sympathizes with me."

Gonzalo said, "You don't know the details."

"I intend to find out," said Trumbull grimly.

The dinner conversation had trouble getting off the subject of tobacco. Avalon, who had reduced his second drink to the usual halfway mark and had then left it severely alone, remarked that cigarette smoking was the only new vice introduced by modern man.

"How about LSD and the mind-expanding drugs?" said Gonzalo at once and Avalon, having thought about it for a moment, owned defeat.

Rubin loudly demanded a definition of "vice." He said, "Anything you don't like is a vice. If you approve of it, it isn't. Many a temperance crusader was addicted to food as viciously as anyone could be addicted to drink." And Rubin, who was thin, pushed his soup away half finished, with a look of ostentatious virtue.

Halsted, who was not thin,

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muttered, "Not many calories in clear turtle soup."

Trumbull said, "Listen, I don't care whether it's a vice or a virtue as long as you keep it to yourself and to those you practice it with. If you drink whiskey and I don't want to, no alcohol gets into my blood: if you want to pick up a dame, there's no risk to *me*. But when you drag at a cigarette, *I* smell the smoke, *I* get it in my lungs, *I* run the risk of disease."

"Quite right," said Evans suddenly. "Filthy habit," and he glanced quickly at Drake who was sitting next to him and who shifted his cigarette to the hand farther away from Evans.

Avalon cleared his throat. "Gentlemen, there are no strictures against tobacco that can be considered new. Over three and a half centuries ago, James the First of England wrote a book called *Counterblaste to Tobacco* in which he rehearsed every point that Tom could make, allowing for gains in scientific knowledge since then—"

"And you know what kind of person James the First was?" said Rubin with a snort. "Filthy and stupid."

"Not really stupid," said Avalon. "Henry the Fourth of France called him the 'wisest fool in Christendom,' but that merely indicated he lacked judgment rather than learning."

"I call that stupid," said Rubin.

"If lacking judgment were the criterion, few of us would escape," said Avalon.

"You'd be first in line, Manny," said Trumbull, and then allowed his expression to soften as Henry placed before him a generous sliver of pecan pie, laden with ice cream. Trumbull approved of pecan pie as he approved of few things.

Over the last of the coffee Gonzalo said, "Gentlemen, gentlemen! I think it's time to leave the general for the specific. Our guest is now the subject and, Tom, are you willing—"

Trumbull said, with alacrity, "I am not only willing to take over the grilling, I insist on it. Let's have quiet. —Henry, you can bring the brandy at your convenience. —Mr. Evans, it is the custom of this group to ask a guest, as our first question, how he justifies his existence. In this case I will tell you how you may justify your existence as far as I am concerned. Please tell me why it is you have current reason to sympathize with my view on smoking, though you smoke yourself on occasion. Have you been cheated by the tobacco industry?"

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Evans shook his head and smiled briefly. "It has nothing to do with the tobacco industry. I wish it had. I work for an investment firm and my reasons have to do with my activities there."

"In what way?"

Evans looked rather gloomy. "That," he said, "would be difficult to explain adequately. I might say that a matter of smoking has rather spoiled a hitherto perfect record of mine in the Sherlock Holmes way. But," and here he sighed, "I'd rather not talk about it, to be perfectly honest."

"Sherlock Holmes?" said Gonzalo, delightedly. "Henry, if—"

Trumbull waved an imperious arm. "Shut *up,* Mario. I think, Mr. Evans, that the meal you have just eaten entitles us to know exactly what you mean. We have time and we will listen."

Evans sighed again. He adjusted his glasses and said, "Mr. Gonzalo, in inviting me, told me I would be grilled. I must confess I did not think my sore spot would be probed at the very start."

Trumbull said, "Sir, I merely followed up your own remark. You have no one to blame but yourself for making it. Please do not spoil our game."

Gonzalo said, "It's all right, Mr. Evans. I assure you that nothing said in this room is ever repeated outside."

"Never!" said Trumbull emphatically.

Evans said, "Not that there is anything in the least criminal or unethical about what has happened to me. It is merely that I will be forced to—well, to deflate myself. I imagine I could easily be made fun of if it were to become general knowledge that—"

"It will not get out," said Trumbull and, anticipating the other's next remark, went on, "Nor will our esteemed waiter be a problem to you. Of us all, Henry is the most discreet and trustworthy."

Evans cleared his throat, then held his brandy glass between thumb and forefinger. "The point is that I am personnel manager. It is my job to help decide on whether this one or that one is hired, fired, promoted, or passed over. Sometimes I turn out to be the court of last resort, for I have proved myself to be expert at the job. —You see, since I have been assured of the confidentiality of what I say, I can afford to praise myself."

"Tell the truth even if it be self-praise," said Trumbull. "In what way have you proved yourself to be expert?"

"In hiring a man to a sensi-

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tive position," said Evans, "and many of our positions are extremely sensitive. Since we routinely handle very large sums of money, we naturally rely on all sorts of reference data which the applicant, whether coming from outside or facing promotion from inside, may be unaware of. We know about the person's background, his character, his personality, his experience.

"Yet that, you see, is often not enough. To know that a person has done well in a certain position is not certain augury that he will do well in another more responsible position, or one that is merely different. To know that he has done well in the past does not tell us what strains he is under that might cause him to do poorly in the future. We may not know to what extent he dissimulates. The human mind is a mystery, gentlemen.

"It may happen, then, that on certain occasions there is room for doubt, despite all the information we have, and it is then that the final judgment has been left to me. For many years my judgments have been justified by subsequent experience with those I have chosen for one position or another, and in many cases by indirect experience with those I have turned away. This has been so until—"

Evans removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes as though aware that an inner sight had failed him. "My superiors are kind enough to say that one mistake in twenty-three years is excusable, but it doesn't help. I shall not be trusted in the future as I have been before. And rightly so, for I acted too soon, and on the basis of a prejudice."

Gonzalo, who was putting the final touches on a sketch of the guest, and making him look preternaturally prim with a mouth pursed to a dot, said, "Against whom or what were you prejudiced?"

Rubin said, "Artists, I hope."

Trumbull cried out, "Let the man *talk*. —The prejudice had something to do with smoking?"

Evans replaced his glasses carefully and fixed his gaze on Trumbull. "I have a system which is impossible to describe in words, for it is based partly on intuition and partly on experience. —I am a close observer of the minutiae of human behavior. I mean the really small things. I select something highly characteristic of a particular person, out of some instinctive feeling I seem to have.

"It might be smoking, for instance. If so I note how he handles the cigarette; how he fiddles with it; the manner in which he puffs; the intervals

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between puffs; how far down he smokes; how he puts out the stub. There is infinite complexity in the interaction between a person and his cigarette—or anything else, his tie clasp, his fingers, the table before him. I have studied the complexity of trivial behavior all my adult life, first out of curiosity and amusement, then out of serious intent."

Drake smiled narrowly and said, "You mean those little things tell you something about the people you interview?"

"Yes, they do," said Evans emphatically.

"All right. That's where the Sherlock Holmes angle comes in. And what can you tell us about ourselves, then?"

Evans shook his head. "I have been paying little professional attention to any of you. Even if I had, the conditions here are not proper for my purposes and I am without the ancillary knowledge that more standardized investigations would have placed on my desk. I can say very little about you."

Trumbull said, "This isn't a parlor game anyway, Jim. Mr. Evans can tell you're a tobacco addict who flips ashes into his soup—"

Evans looked surprised and said hastily, "As a matter of fact, Dr. Drake *did* get some ashes in his soup—"

"And I noticed it too," said Trumbull. "What *are* the proper conditions for you to study your victim?"

"The conditions I have standardized over the years. The person to be interviewed enters my office alone. He sits in a certain chair under a certain light. He is under a certain tension I do nothing to relieve. I take some time to choose what it is I will observe in detail, and then we start."

"What if you don't find anything you can observe? What if he's a complete blank?" asked Gonzalo.

"That never happens. Something always shows up."

Gonzalo said, "Did something show up when you interviewed me?"

Evans shook his head. "I never discuss that sort of thing with the individuals involved, but I can tell you this. There was a mirror in the room."

Gonzalo bore up under the general laughter and said, "A handsome man has his problems."

Trumbull said, "Someone must have told you that or you read it somewhere. —Mr. Evans, could you get to the crux of your story: your embarrassment."

Evans nodded and looked unhappy. He turned slightly and said to Henry, "I wonder if I

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might have another cup of coffee."

"Certainly, sir," said Henry.

Evans sipped at it and said thoughtfully, "The trouble is, you see, that I have watched smoking so meticulously on so many occasions that I have developed a dislike for smokers, a prejudice, if you will, even though I myself smoke on occasion. It is not nearly as strong a prejudice as yours, Mr. Trumbull, but sometimes it explodes and it did just that, to my own hurt, in one instance. The story concerns two men who had worked in a branch office of ours; we can call them—uh—Williams and Adams."

Avalon cleared his throat and said, "If I were you, Mr. Evans, I would use their real names. In the course of telling the story, you are very likely to do so anyway. Remember that you speak here in complete confidence."

Evans said, "I will attempt the substitution in any case. The two men were quite different in appearance. Williams was a large bulky man with something of a stoop and a slow way of talking. Adams was smaller, straighter, and could be very eloquent indeed. Both were about the same age, in their early thirties; both were equally competent, it appeared, and had fulfilled their jobs with equal efficiency; both seemed to be qualified to fill a key opening that had become available in the home office. Both were bachelors, both rather withdrawn. Both led quiet lives and did not seem to show any elements of instability in their socializing—"

Halsted interrupted. "What does that mean? Instability?"

Evans said, "Neither gambled to a dangerous extent. Neither exhibited sexual or personal habits so at variance with their social surroundings as to make them unduly conspicuous. Neither exhibited strong likes or dislikes that might twist them into unexpected actions. They had come to be friendly in a mild sort of way while working in the same office, but it was symptomatic of the lack of intensity of emotion in both men that although it was the closest friendship either had, as far as we knew, it was still only a casual relationship."

Rubin, leaning back in his chair, said, "Well, that churns up my writer's soul. Here we have two mild-mannered buddies, going down life's pathway in parallel paths, both quiet milksops—and now they find that they are competing for the same job, a job with more money and more prestige, and suddenly the lambs become lions and turn on each other—"

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"Nothing of the kind," said Evans impatiently. "There was competition between the two, of course. That couldn't be helped. But neither before nor after was there any sign that this rivalry would find a release in violence.

"Both had taken advantage of the company's policy of encouraging further education and had been involved in courses in computer technology which we supervised. Both had done very well. It was hard to choose between them. All the data we had indicated, rather surprisingly, that Williams, slow, bumbling Williams, was actually a trifle the more intelligent of the two. Yet there was hesitation; he somehow didn't *seem* more intelligent than the quicker and more articulate Adams. So they left it up to me, with their usual confidence in my methods—"

Trumbull said, "Do you mean to tell us that your company *knew* you judged men by how they fiddled with paper clips and so on?"

"They knew," said Evans, a little defensively, "but they also knew that my recommendations were invariably proved accurate in the aftermath. What more could they ask?"

He finished his coffee, then went on. "I saw Williams first, since I rather had the suspicion that he might be the right man. I would not turn down the better-qualified man simply because he was slow-spoken. I suppose," and he sighed, "everything would have been entirely different if I had seen Adams first, but we can't adjust past circumstance to suit our convenience, can we?

"Williams seemed distinctly nervous, but that was certainly not unusual. I asked some routine questions while I studied his behavior. I noticed that his right forefinger moved on the desk as though it were writing words, but that stopped when he caught me looking at his hand; I should have been more careful there. In fact, I had not really settled on what I wanted to study when he reached for the cigarettes and matches."

"What cigarettes?" asked Rubin.

"I keep an unopened pack of cigarettes on the desk, together with a matchbook, some paper clips, a ballpoint pen, and other small objects within easy reach of the person being interviewed. There is a great tendency to handle them and that can be useful to me. The pack of cigarettes is often played with, for instance, but it is rarely opened.

"Williams, however, opened the pack and that caught me

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rather by surprise, I must confess. His dossier had not mentioned him to be a heavy smoker, and for someone to help himself to the interviewer's cigarettes without asking permission would indicate a strong addiction."

Evans closed his eyes as though he were reproducing the scene on the inner surface of his eyelids and said, "I can see it now. I became aware of an incongruity in the proceedings when he placed a cigarette between his lips with an attempt at simulating self-possession that utterly failed. It was then that I began to watch, since the incompatibility of the arrogance that led him to take a cigarette without permission and the timorousness with which he handled the cigarette riveted my attention.

"His lips were dry, so that he had to remove the cigarette briefly and wet his lips with his tongue. He then put it back between his lips and held it there as though he were afraid it would fall out. He semed more and more nervous and I was now watching nothing else, only his hand and the cigarette. I was sure they would tell me all I wanted to know. I heard him scratch a match to life and, still holding onto the cigarette, he lit it with the match in his left hand.

"He seemed to hesitate, taking one or two shallow puffs while I watched, and then, as though somehow aware I was not impressed by his performance, he inhaled deeply, and instantly went into a prolonged and possibly dangerous fit of coughing. —It turned out that he didn't smoke."

Evans opened his eyes. "That came out at once, of course. Apparently he felt that by smoking he would impress me as a suave and competent fellow. He knew that he had a bumbling appearance and wanted to counteract that. It did quite the reverse. It was an attempt to use me, to make a fool of me, and I was furious. I tried not to show it but I knew at once that under no circumstances would I recommend Williams for the job.

"And that was disastrous, of course. Had I seen Adams first, I would surely have interviewed him in my most meticulous fashion. As it was, with Williams out, I am afraid I treated Adams casually. I recommended him after the barest interaction. Do you wonder that my prejudice against smoking has intensified and that I am more inclined now than I was before to sympathize with your views, Mr. Trumbull?"

Trumbull said, "I take it that

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Mr. Adams proved incompetent at the job."

"Not at all," said Evans. "For two years he filled it in the fashion that I had predicted in my report after my inadequate examination of him. In fact, he was brilliant. In a number of cases he made decisions that showed real initiative and courage that, in the aftermath, proved to have been correct.

"He was, in fact, in line for another promotion when one day he disappeared, and with him one million dollars in company assets. When the situation was studied, it seemed that he had been intelligent and daring enough to play successful games with a computer, and his courageous decisions, which we had all applauded, had been part of his game. You see, had I examined him as thoroughly as I should have, I would not have missed that streak of patient cunning. It was obvious he had been planning the job for years and had studied computer technology with that thought in mind and with the object of qualifying himself for the promotion which he finally gained. —Quite disastrous, quite disastrous."

Drake said, "One million is quite disastrous all right."

"No, no," said Evans. "I mean the blow to my pride and to my standing in the company. Financially it is no great blow. We were insured and we may even get the stolen items back some day. In fact, justice has been done in a crude sort of way. Adams did not get away with it; in fact, he's dead." Evans looked depressed.

"Rather brutally, too, I'm afraid," he went on. "He had lost himself, quite deliberately and successfully, in one of the rabbit warrens of the city, disguised himself more by a new way of life than by anything physical, lived on his savings and didn't touch his stealings, and waited patiently for time to bring him greater safety. But he got into a fight somehow and was knifed. He was taken to the morgue and his fingerprints identified him. That was about six months ago."

"Who killed him?" asked Gonzalo.

"That's not known. The police theory is this: the privacy index of a slum is low and somehow the fact that Adams had something hidden must have gotten around. Perhaps he drank a bit to forget the rather miserable life he was leading while waiting to be safely rich, and perhaps he talked a bit too much. Someone tried to cut himself in on the loot; Adams resisted; and Adams died."

"And did whoever killed him get the loot?"

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Evans said, "The police think not. None of the stolen items has surfaced in the six months since Adams' murder. Adams might have the patience to sit on a fortune and remain in hiding, but the average thief would not do so. So the police think the hoard is still wherever Adams hid it."

Halsted made his characteristic brushing gesture along his high forehead, and said thoughtfully, "Couldn't you check on the company's knowledge of the details of Adams' life and personality and work out a kind of psychological profile that would tell you where the stolen items would have been placed?"

"I tried that," said Evans, "but the answer we came up with was that a man like Adams would hide it most ingeniously. And that has done us no good."

Avalon said with a sudden slap of his hand on the table, "I have an idea. Where is Williams? The other man, the one who lost out, I mean?"

Evans said, "He's still at his old job, and doing well enough."

Avalon said, "Well, you might consult him. You said they were friends. He might know something the company doesn't, something vital that he himself wouldn't think is vital."

"Yes," said Evans dryly. "That also occurred to us and he was questioned. But it was useless. You see, the friendship between the two men had been mild enough to begin with, but it had ceased completely after the incident of the interviews.

"Apparently Adams, in apparent friendliness, had advised Williams to practise smoking in order to demonstrate self-possession and nonchalance. Adams had often told the large, slow-moving, slow-speaking Williams that he made an unfortunate first impression and should do something about it.

"Adams' often-repeated advice had its effect at precisely the wrong moment for Williams. Sitting in my office and keenly aware that he was making a poor appearance, he could not resist reaching for the cigarettes—with disastrous results. The poor man blamed Adams for what happened, although the action was his own and he must bear the responsibility himself. Still, it ended their friendship and we could learn nothing useful from Williams."

Gonzalo interrupted excitedly, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Couldn't Adams have deliberately set it up that way, sort of hypnotized Williams into the act? Couldn't he have arranged it so that Williams was

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sure to reach for a cigarette at some crucial point? The interview would be the crucial point; Williams would be eliminated; Adams would get the job."

Evans said, "I don't accept such Machiavellianism. How would Adams know there would be cigarettes at hand on just that occasion? Too unlikely."

"Besides," said Avalon, "that sort of Iago-like manipulation of human beings works on the stage but not in real life."

There was a silence after that and then Trumbull said, "So that's it, I suppose. One crook, now a dead man, and one bundle of stolen items hidden somewhere. Nothing much we can do with that. I don't think even Henry could do anything with it." He looked toward Henry who was standing by the sideboard patiently. "Henry! Could you tell us, by any chance, the hiding place of the ill-gotten pelf?"

"I think I might indicate the probable whereabouts, sir," said Henry calmly.

Trumbull said, "What?"

Evans said in Trumbull's direction, "Is he joking?"

Henry said, "I think it is possible, on the basis of what we have heard here this evening, to work out what may really have happened."

Evans said indignantly, "What really happened other than what I have told you? This is nonsense!"

Trumbull said, "I think we ought to hear Henry, Mr. Evans. He's got a knack, you know."

"Well," said Evans, "let him have his say."

Henry said, "It occurs to me that because of Mr. Williams' foolish behavior at the interview you were virtually forced to recommend Mr. Adams—yet it is hard to believe that Mr. Williams could be so stupid as to imagine he could pretend to smoke when he was actually a nonsmoker. It is common knowledge that a nonsmoker will cough when he inhales cigarette smoke the first time."

Evans said, "Williams says he was tricked into it by Adams. Nobody believes that. It may be hard to believe that a person could be stupid, but under pressure some quite intelligent people do stupid things, and this was one of those occasions."

"Perhaps it was," said Henry, "and perhaps we are looking at the matter from the wrong end. Perhaps it was not Adams who tricked Williams into attempting to smoke, thus forcing you to recommend Adams for the job. Perhaps it was Williams who did it deliberately in order to force you to recommend Adams for the job."

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"Why should he do that?" said Evans.

"Might the two not have been working together, with Williams the brains of the pair? Williams arranged to have Adams do the actual work while he remained in the background and directed activities. Then might not Williams, after arranging a murder as cleverly as he had arranged the theft, have taken the profits? And if all that is so, would you not expect Williams, right now, to know where the stolen items are?"

Evans stared in utter disbelief and it fell to Trumbull to put the general stupefaction into words, "You've pulled that out of thin air, Henry."

"But it fits, Mr. Trumbull. Adams could not have arranged the smoking attempt. He wouldn't have known the cigarettes would be there. Williams *would* know; he was sitting there. He might have had something else in mind to force Adams into the job, but, seeing the cigarettes, he seized the opportunity to use them."

"But it's still out of the whole cloth, Henry. There's no evidence."

"Consider," said Henry earnestly. "A nonsmoker can scarcely pretend to be a smoker. He will cough; nothing will prevent that. But anyone can cough at will; a cough need never be genuine. What if Williams was in actual fact an accomplished smoker who had once given up smoking. It would have been the easiest thing for him to pretend he was a nonsmoker by pretending to cough uncontrollably."

Evans shook his head stubbornly. "There is nothing to indicate Williams ever was a smoker."

"Isn't there?" said Henry. "Is it wise of you, sir, to concentrate so entirely on one particular variety of behavior pattern when you interview a prospect? Might you not miss something crucial that was not part of the immediate pattern you were studying?"

Evans said coldly, "No."

Henry said, "You were watching the cigarette, sir, and nothing else. You were not watching the match with which the cigarette was lit. You said you *heard* him scratch the match; you didn't see it."

"Yes, but what of that?"

Henry said, "These days there is almost no occasion to use matches for anything but cigarettes. A nonsmoker, in an age when electricity does everything, and even gas stoves have pilot lights, can easily go years without striking a match. It follows that a nonsmoker who cannot inhale smoke without

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coughing cannot handle a matchbook with any skill at all. Yet you described Williams as having held his cigarette with his right hand and having used only his left hand to light it."

"Yes."

"An unskilled smoker," said Henry, "would surely have used two hands to light a cigarette—one to hold the matchbook and one to remove the match and strike it on the friction strip. A skilled smoker pretending to be unskilled might be so intent on making sure he handled the cigarette with the properly amateurish touch that he might forget to do the same for the match. In fact, forgetting the match altogether he might, absent-mindedly, use the kind of technique that only an accomplished smoker could possibly have learned and have lit the match one-handed. I have seen Dr. Drake do such a thing."

Drake, who had, for the last minute, been laughing himself into a quiet coughing fit, managed to say, "I don't do it often any more because I use a cigarette lighter these days, but here's how it goes." Holding a book of matches in his left hand, he bent one of the matches double with his left thumb so that the head came up against the friction strip. A quick stroke set it aflame.

Henry said, "That is what Williams must have done, and that one-handed match strike indicates an accomplished smoker far more surely than any number of coughs would indicate a nonsmoker. If the police look back into his past life, they'll find a time when he smoked heavily. His act in your office will then seem exactly what it was—an act."

"Good God, yes," said Trumbull. "And you can preserve the Black Widowers confidentiality. Just tell the police that you remember—what you actually remember, what you've told us tonight."

"But to have not realized this," said Evans confusedly, "will make me seem more of a fool than ever."

"Not," said Henry softly, "if your statement leads to the solution of a million-dollar crime."

"Q"

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a GERVASE FEN short-short by

EDMUND CRISPIN

George Gotobed had never met his Aunt Fancy—well, she wasn't really his aunt; she was his stepfather's sister. But when he finally met her, the meeting proved memorable . . .

DEATH AND AUNT FANCY

by EDMUND CRISPIN

The woman who opened the door of the cottage to George Gotobed's knock was big-boned, active-looking, tubular-shaped, and somewhere in the late fifties or early sixties, with a booming voice.

"Mr. Gotobed?" she greeted him. "My name is Preedy, and I am your aunt's companion. Do step inside. We're still in a bit of a muddle, I'm afraid. You'll have to remember that it's only three days since we moved in, and make allowances for us.

"But so cosy, don't you think, and you must speak up a bit"—this in response to some muttered civility of George's—"because we're both hard of hearing, though your aunt has one of these deaf-aid things, no use for them myself—this way, and you'd better leave your hat on that chair."

George Gotobed's Aunt Fancy, whom he was meeting for the first time, proved to be of a different order of beings from her companion. She was a little plump robin of a woman, wearing a brooch-spangled frock of unsuitable blue and sitting hunched defensively on a sofa.

Beside her a small radio set discoursed light music in a low murmur. If she were deaf, George asked himself, how on earth could she hear the thing?—and only then noticed the hearing aid plugged into her ear.

And now she, too, was murmuring at him, uttering the conventional greetings, asking the expected questions. Infected

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by her diplomatic undertone, George answered in kind—until Miss Preedy impatiently requested them both to speak up; after which they shouted.

But it was not until Miss Preedy went to the kitchen to fetch the tea that the curious incident occurred. As the door closed behind the companion, the expression on Aunt Fancy's mild features altered abruptly, giving place to one of alarm.

"George—Mr. Gotobed," she whispered, "you mustn't leave me. I don't know why she's doing this." Her eyes shifted. "I'm frightened," she said. "Don't go away, will you? Stay the night. Please, please don't go a—"

And at that she broke off, for the door had opened and Miss Preedy was back. For heaven's sake, thought George, is this meant to be a joke? Or is the old girl a bit loopy?

As he sat there uncomfortably sipping his tea, with the muted tones of Quilter and Eric Coates still filling the air, he found that for the life of him he was unable to take his aunt's words seriously. Of course, there had been old ladies whose companions had murdered them for their money. But apparently Aunt Fancy wasn't well off these days, and— No, no; ridiculous.

They ate and drank and talked politely, and presently George rose to take his leave. The invitation to stay, he noted, was not renewed; and he was steadfast in avoiding his aunt's eye. Persecution mania, he reflected, as he walked back to the village; poor old thing.

But he always wondered, looking back on it afterward, how far he had really, in his inmost heart, believed that.

Since it was impossible for him to get back to Oxford that night, he had booked a room at the village inn, intending to make the return journey in the morning. But in actual fact it was 48 hours or more before he reappeared at his college.

"So there I was, sir, stuck with it," he told his tutor. "Aunt Fancy smothered with her own pillow during the night, the cottage burgled, policemen and lawyers to see, the body to identify—what with one thing and another I was lucky to get away as soon as I did."

"My dear George," said the tutor, whose name was Gervase Fen, "there's no need to apologize. Without wishing to be unkind, I may say that all this is vastly more entertaining than your opinions on *The Merchant of Venice*. Of course, I'm very sorry about your aunt—"

"That's all right, sir," George interrupted him. "I can't say

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I'm all that cut up about it—except, of course, for the fact that I deliberately ignored her appeal for help; that's not so funny. No, the point about it is that I'd never seen the old lady before, and she wasn't really my aunt even—she was my stepfather's sister—so naturally I don't feel—"

"Just so. Am I right in thinking that she was your only remaining relative?"

"Yes, sir."

"Natural enough, then, that she should remember you in her will."

"Well, sir, not quite so natural as all that. You see, when my stepfather was alive she quarreled with him violently. And she's never once written to me till just the other day, when she asked me to come and see her; so I certainly wasn't expecting to inherit anything from her."

"Yes. Interesting. Let me get this straight now. As I understand it, your aunt went out to Kenya some forty years ago and remained there solidly up till last month, when she embarked for England. Incidentally, why the move back home? Any particular reason?"

"I gather she was running out of cash, sir. And if she'd got to pocket her pride and live on a more modest scale she preferred to be among strangers."

"I see. But in that case your inheritance—"

"Life insurance, sir—there's a big sum to come in life insurance. The companion, Miss Preedy, gets half, and I get the other half." George hesitated, then burst out: "Look here, sir, who do you think did the murder? Was it a burglar? Or was it Miss Preedy?"

"Neither," said Fen promptly. "Have you a photograph of your aunt?"

George shook his head, bewildered. "No, I haven't. But—"

"Then we must rely," Fen interposed, "on Dawkins, an expupil of mine. For some years now Dawkins has been living and working in Nairobi. Also, he is an indefatigable diner-out. You can take it from me that there is no one more likely to be able to give me the facts about your aunt."

Fen rose. "The cablegram service is quick," he observed, "so I think that if you were to come back in two hours—"

And two hours later the reply had, in fact, arrived. FANCY LOOMIS FAIRLY DEAF, George read with astonishment, PREEDY NOT DEAF AT ALL GREETINGS DAWKINS. "But what does it mean sir?" George demanded.

Fen grunted. "We shall have to confirm it by wiring photographs to Kenya," he said, "and I've already rung up the police,

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and they've agreed to do that. But from what you've told me, I've no doubt about the result."

"I just don't understand, sir."

"Oh, come, George. Surely even you realize by now that the person you thought was Miss Preedy is, in fact, your aunt, and that the person you thought was your aunt was, in fact, Miss Preedy?

"Nor," Fen went on, "is there much difficulty about the motive. Here is your aunt, running out of money, with the life insurance her only possible resource. So what does she do? Answer: she comes with Miss Preedy to England, where they aren't known, swaps roles, and commits murder with a view to inheriting half of the life insurance."

Fen reached for a cigarette. "You were brought into it as legatee and as visitor to the cottage in order to diffuse a suspicion which must otherwise have been fairly concentrated. And in case for any reason that failed, the burglary was faked to make a supplementary red herring.

"How your aunt persuaded Miss Preedy to the substitution we shall probably never know. But to judge from your description, Miss Preedy was a very biddable person, very much under your aunt's thumb. *'I don't know why she's doing this.'* Poor creature, she had her suspicions, even so."

"But how did you know, sir?"

"The radio, George," said Fen. "The radio, of course. It was playing quietly, you said. Your 'aunt' had a hearing aid on too.

"Now, you were talking to her—to start with, anyway—in a low voice. If she was actually deaf, then the hearing aid must have been amplifying your voice considerably.

"But in that case, it was also amplifying the radio. *If* the woman you were speaking to was genuinely deaf—genuinely using the hearing aid—then the radio must all the time have sounded quite loud to her, even though it sounded quiet to you.

"Can you conceive anyone so circumstanced speaking to you in a low voice, *whispering* to you? Do you naturally speak to people in a low voice when you have the radio on loud?

"So the answer was obvious: the woman you spoke to wasn't deaf at all. And once I realized that a trick had been played, it didn't take much inquiry to find out why."

Fen sighed. "Yes, I'm sorry, George; your Aunt Fancy is going to hang. And it's The Merchant, after all, which has the last word."

"Shakespeare, sir?"

"Shakespeare. Let us," said Fen, "all ring Fancy's knell."

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a *NEW* spy story by

MacLEAN O'SPELIN

A sophisticated spy story about two highly skilled journeymen of the art—an Action Op(erative) who was a "connoisseur of gimmickry" and a hired killer who did not have a misty brain or a slow hand; and "this was a big operation—there would be a monstrous brouhaha if it blew" . . . Either MacLean O'Spelin (a pseudonym) knows exactly what he's writing about from first-hand experience—"the nuts and bolts of an operation"—or he has an impressive imagination. Judge for yourself . . .

DEPARTMENT OF PROBLEMS RESOLVED:

Operation Gimmick

by MacLEAN O'SPELIN

My job wasn't on the line—my Chief in the PR Department had made that clear—but my career was. And since, in common with most middle-management employees, my aim in life was a career, I felt the pressure keenly.

Nothing unique there, of course. Nearly everyone wants a career, not just a mere job. But, ironically, even though I knew exactly which weakness had held me back, I couldn't seem to correct it. Simply stated, my deficiency was that I had no notable gimmick. And this despite my being a connoisseur of gimmickry, a collector, a student of notable gimmicks.

Slater, the PR Chief, didn't really comprehend the firepower a good gimmick can pack—which is why he'll never rise to the top ranks of the Consortium. He was a solid performer, a skilled journeyman,

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but he was mistaken when, as we talked in his office, he said, "Corson, to get ahead you're going to have to resolve this problem. And resolve it by finding a killer—the right killer."

"I'll resolve it," I said with more confidence than I felt. But I had a good chance for I, too, was a skilled journeyman, a man who had mastered a difficult craft. It is the journeymen of the world who make it work, who make it go around. But it is not the journeymen who get the big money, the prestige and the power. It is the top brass, the policy boys.

"You'd better," growled Slater with a fierce draw on his double-corona and an effort at an ominous scowl. "Problems Resolved is the name of our department's game, fella. And, by God, my men resolve problems—or get kicked downstairs."

Tough talk. That, too, was a gimmick. But like his fat cigar, much too common, much too hackneyed. Oh, sure, adequate enough to get a skilled journeyman a job as chief of department. But too stale—even if the cigars had been H. Uppman Havanas—to push a man up toward the Executive Committee of the Consortium which is where the power and the prestige and the big money reside.

"Will do, Chief." Slater and I were the only Americans in the polyglot PR Department and we were expected to come on strong with the Will-do, Can-do Yankee spirit. So, even though it was useless as a gimmick, I gave it lip service. Slater wasn't really a bad sort and he enjoyed it, so why not?

He also enjoyed being called Chief, and his tone, predictably, softened to bluff geniality: "'At's the old fight, Johnny." Immediately, though, creases of worry appeared above his eyebrows as he cautioned, "Remember, now. No specifics. No details about targets or objectives. The Committee doesn't care to hear about the nuts and bolts of an operation. That's our job, nuts and bolts."

"Right, Chief." He needn't have worried. I knew how to deal with the Committee. I had done my homework in the spotting files in the vault area of the early Nineteenth Century stone building that housed our Department and I was pretty sure the killer I wanted was a man named Mustafa. But I knew better than to mention his name to the Committee—its members dealt in policy, in generalities. Nuts and bolts and names were for journeymen.

I left the old building, which had been selected for its drab facelessness, and drove thrugh the narrow streets of the

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medium-sized French town that, unknowingly, shelters the Consortium directly to the equally faceless headquarters building. There I cooled my heels in a characterless anteroom until the Executive Committee was ready to receive me.

Many suspect the existence of the Consortium, but suspicion is a long way from proof. The huge multinational corporations that are members of the Consortium hotly deny that they *are* members—Rule A for any organization so accused. The Consortium itself, being clandestine, of course keeps mum. Which is why its PR Department is not its Public Relations Department. The last thing the Consortium wants is relations with the public.

The Consortium treats with matters having common effect on its member corporations —matters which affect their profits. When such matters threaten to become insoluble, the Consortium's Department of Problems Resolved is called upon. The current problem could be stated simply: What must be done to block the oil-producing nations from wresting complete control of the world's crude oil supply from the weakening grip of the multinational oil companies?

The corporations that make up the Consortium don't mind embargoes. They don't mind astronomical well-head prices for crude. Such things increase profits.

But the oil-producing nations pursue a policy of steadily eating away at the Consortium members' control of the world's supply. That's the rub; that *decreases* profits.

So the member corporations bucked the problem up to the Executive Committee of the Consortium which handed off to the PR Department. Slater then lateraled to me, and I had worked out a proposed resolution of the problem, and when, finally, I was ushered into the soundproofed and bugproofed room where the four Committee members sat at a round conference table, I was ready.

"Gentlemen," I began. "The problem within our problem is Sayed al Abdellatif, the Finance Minister of Mahgreb."

"An intelligent man, Abdellatif," mused the Englishman, the representative of a British-Dutch corporation. "Crafty beggar too."

"Correct," barked the graying but still ramrod-straight man who represented a West German corporation.

"He's the quarterback," said the American. The other three turned to look at him blankly and he explained: "The guy

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who calls the plays and runs the team. Even Nasser had trouble getting the Brotherhood of Arab Nations to work as a team. But these days, when Abdellatif calls the signals on oil, the others listen and then run his plays."

As the session continued, I found myself responding automatically to the usual not-quite-to-the-main-point questions. I began to study the gimmicks on display. The German's left sleeve was empty. He could have worn a prosthetic arm, but then he would have sacrificed the graphic reminder that he was an ex-general, a non-Nazi hero of Rommel's Afrika Korps.

The Englishman spoke with the typically languid drawl of the aristocratic old-Oxonian, but he wore, looped across his weskit, an atypically showy watch chain. Its heavy gold links strung together a series of lapis lazuli scarabs—priceless antiques. When he checked the time, one instantly recalled that not only did he know everything possible about oil, he was also an Egyptologist, a foremost authority on the treasures of Tutankhamen.

Cosmetic surgery would easily have repaired the American's very badly set broken nose. But gone, then, would have been the badge that announced that here was the former amateur boxer who, incredibly, had won a gold medal at each of three successive Olympic Games.

The representative of a French corporation, a sinewy, sharp-faced man, wore modish but masculine eyeglasses whose lenses were tinted dark gray. Usually dark glasses are a shopworn gimmick. But not when they helped create a sinister effect that reminded one that here was the former Chief of the *Service de l'Action,* the most secret, and the most feared, arm of French Intelligence.

Probably because of his background, it was he who grasped my circumlocutions most clearly and most quickly. Neatly he steered the rest of the Committee toward full approval of my plan. And of me as Action Operative.

As I rose to go, the Englishman had an afterthought. "Your Arabic is, ah, adequate, Mr. Corson?"

I answered crisply, "It's Classical Arabic, sir, not Mahgrebian. But it'll do."

Not to be outdone in the afterthought department, the German asked curtly, "You know something of oil?"

I replied, "I was once three years under cover as a petroleum and non-ferrous

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mineralogist, General."

"Good, Carson, good." His record had been good in Africa and brilliant in the Ardennes—I forgave him his getting my name wrong.

"Good hunting," said the Frenchman with a thin smile of dismissal. His words were as close as anyone came to naming my precise mission.

I drove back through the narrow streets to the PR building where I went along to the Support Section to arrange for an emergency kit. The Support man I preferred to deal with, a somber Dane, brought it out and I doublechecked the contents: reserve supply of various currencies; two extra false passports; a D-capsule; a one-shot pocket pistol; a transceiver cunningly built into an Arabic-French dictionary.

The last three were gimmicks—but not the kind I study. More accurately, they were gadgets. The D-capsule was mandatory, even though I certainly had no intention of swallowing it to protect the Consortium. The pistol was designed to look like one of those bulky cyclindrical pipe lighters, but its defect was that there wasn't room in its metal casing for it to function both as a lighter and as a weapon. The transceiver was a winner, though. Somehow PR's Japanese technicians had built in the circuitry so cleverly that you could use it either as a clandestine short-range commo device or as an excellent dictionary. Very neat.

I asked the Support man to include a supply of Entero-Vioform—dysentery has ruined more than one operation—and told him to ship the kit via the usual clandestine channel, marked Priority A, Immediate.

Then I went up to tell Slater that the Committee had given PR the green light and that I was on my way. "Okay," he said around a fresh cigar. "Don't get some fanatic as the killer. And no loose ends, either."

"This Mustafa looks good to me. And he's a pro, not a fanatic. But I'll check him out."

"Fine, Johnny. Try like hell not to blow it; it's a big one." He was showing the strain a little, I thought. Understandably—he had no notable achievements in his record to cushion him against a big blow—

That was it! Suddenly my observations of the gimmickry of the Committee clicked into place and my theories crystallized: behind every successful gimmick must be the noteworthy achievement it symbolizes. My studies had shown that no gimmick is good enough to stand on its own; but even

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memorable achievements are soon forgotten unless memories are constantly jogged by a notable gimmick. The one requires the other!

Still, my now having a solid conviction didn't seem to help much. The problem of Sayed al Abdellatif, Finance Minister of Mahgreb, was a big one. But not so far out of the ordinary that my solving it would be truly memorable.

But at least I finally knew what I was looking for. And the first thing to do was *not* to blow this operation. No gimmick packed enough punch to erase a blown operation from the long memory of the Executive Committee.

The Air France Caravelle angled steeply down over the blue sea toward Mahgreb's capital city on the southern littoral of the Mediterranean. As usual, the North African air was clean and clear and the airport buildings rushing up from below were dazzling white in the bright sunlight.

No one was to meet me; except for an infrequent covert contact at the safehouse where I would stay, my communications with our Station would be exclusively by the transceiver-dictionary.

A taxi took me to a rental agency where I made a cash deposit on a nondescript Simca. I hadn't been in this beautiful city on the sea for over a year, so I drove around a while, reorienting myself, before going on to the safehouse. There a trainee from the Consortium's local Station was waiting with my emergency kit. The young fellow, an Italian "employee" of the Mahgrebian branch of the big corporation which covered the Station, was jittery. He's never met a real live Action Operative before—our Stations run straight intelligence operations only; Action ops are always handled from outside by the PR Department.

I reviewed our contact plans and commo signals with him, tested the transceiver briefly, then got rid of him. Beginners in the trade make me nervous, particularly when *they're* nervous.

That evening I began activating lines to standby PR agents and informants and by the end of the next day I knew a good deal more about Mustafa. He continued to look good, so the following day, when a message filtered through to me that he was presently in Khebir on the northeastern edge of the Rif mountains, I gassed up the Simca and set out.

Ever since I'd used it as a cover, I'd kept up with nonferrous mineralogy, particularly

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copper, so I kept my eyes open as I neared the Rif. You don't prospect by eye alone, of course, but traces of the red metal can be found in almost any country and I did spot a few surface characteristics that might come in handy as cover talking-points.

Khebir I found to be a market town of fair size, but it didn't take long to locate Mustafa. Although nothing had ever been proved, his skill in his craft was widely known and widely respected. Thus I could make my opening hints fairly broad and he and I spent a couple of days feeling each other out over glasses of sticky-sweet mint tea in dingy cafés.

Tall and saturnine, Mustafa had a gaunt, very dark face dominated by a scimitar of a nose. He didn't look like a confirmed *kif*-eater, but I won't work with anyone hooked on even the mild Mahgrebian variety of hemp. So I edged into the subject to make sure.

"*Kif*," he said reflectively in his softly guttural voice. "Good sometimes. But too much puts mist in the brain, makes the hand slow." Then his right hand flickered and a blade flashed in the murky light before vanishing back into the wide sleeve of his flowing jellabah.

"Your hand," I said, "strikes with the speed of the desert adder."

Nodding agreement, he held up both hands and admired them. On the brown sinewy fingers were many rings, thin circlets of ivory. His gimmick, his reminder to the world that his achievements were noteworthy.

According to those professing to know, his rings were bone, not ivory. Fashioned, so the tale went, of bits and pieces of his victims.

Maybe. To me it seemed highly unlikely that he would linger at the scene to hack off a leg or arm and cart it, dripping, through the streets.

But whether the rings were ivory or bone or only plastic was irrelevant. His achievements were real, and his rings were their symbols.

I decided that I liked his style and we came to terms. Then I opened the discussion of plans. "Can you shoot, Mustafa?"

"Expertly, my friend. But I will use the knife."

"No. You're famous. Abdellatif's bodyguards won't let you get anywhere near him."

A faint smile acknowledged his fame. "I can shoot, yes. But I *live* by the knife."

Actually, I planned that he would use his knife. But I

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wanted to get the point across that I was in charge. The planning of these things was my trade. I have learned from my mistakes. One of the worst is to let the killer do his own thinking.

Some killers are malleable, but many are not. And those who, like Mustafa, are skilled journeymen and not wild-eyed fanatics, are vividly aware of the risks to be run. So what an Action Operative must do is convince the killer that all the alternate plans, the escape routes, the precision timing are parts of a tidy package of protection for him.

And it is true, of course. The repercussions from a blown operation are best imagined, not experienced.

We debated on and off for almost a full day. The scales tipped when I described the beachhouse from where he would be picked up by jet-boat and whisked to safety. His black eyes glinted. "Good! In six months Minister Abdellatif will be forgotten. Then I will return, a hero."

I chuckled. "Stranger things have happened."

He studied me. "Your plans are excellent. But a gun will bark like the wild dog of the Sahara. My knife has no voice."

I mentioned silencers. But, good journeyman that he was, he knew that they throw accuracy off and work well for only one or two shots. "*Plastique,*" he suggested. I rebuttted: "You'd have to throw it. Too easy to miss. Bystanders might get wasted—uselessly."

He thought for a long moment, then slowly but firmly he nodded. Swiftly, before he could reconsider, I outlined the rest of my plan, and that same evening we began a series of dry runs.

Although tall, Mustafa could move like a dark wraith, and he began to enjoy the playacting, the moving from point to point on an exact timetable. Sometimes I played the role of Abdellatif, sometimes I played one of the Finance Minister's bodyguards or a Mahgreb State Security man. I enjoyed it too; practise never hurts even the most seasoned Action Operative.

When I decided we were letter-perfect, I set up clandestine contact plans for the capital city and then we broke up. I was pleased with my fellow journeyman. A last verbal check-off just before the job and it should go like a classroom object lesson.

One of Abdellatif's gimmicks was a French mistress. Although not uncommon in Africa—for those with the

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wherewithal—it is effective. *On est arrivé*, it announces to the world. One has arrived, one has made worthwhile achievements.

The mistress was ash-blonde, *épatante,* and had been installed in a palatial seaside villa with a crowd of servants and a Mercedes-Benz for company. Abdellatif was, after all, Minister of Finance.

A member of the Station's network of intelligence agents was able to arrange an invitation for me to attend one of the large diplomatic receptions that are part of any capital's routine. It was expected that the Minister would attend, joining his lady there when his evening session of gouging the oil companies was over.

The evening was typically balmy and by the time I arrived, the crowd had overflowed from the reception rooms of the city's most deluxe hotel to the beautiful adjoining Moorish garden. As one does at such crushes, I maneuvered for an introduction to the lady and was successful.

"Enchantée," she said, tilting her head so that her remarkable eyes caught the light. "You are a seeker of *le cuivre?* But how droll! Ignore copper. Seek gold. Find it and the world will seek *you,* Monsieur."

To include her, her glance said. But it was just a Frenchwoman's second nature showing—on a par with breathing. I said, "I shall try, Madame, and if lucky I will shower you with golden baubles."

I would have relished cabling Slater that I had won the lady from Abdellatif, seduced her, and then persuaded her to slip my D-capsule into his lunchtime *harira.* But, actually, she was not the type and neither, I fear, was I. Unlike the Minister, I had no treasury to dip into.

But she enjoyed my semi-flirtatious comment, and she kept me in her coterie of respectful admirers until Abdellatif finally arrived. Handsome, confident, riding a crest of international fame—infamy, of course, from the Consortium's point of view—he was entitled to make an entrance, and he did. His lady's eyes glowed and her tone was proprietary as she introduced her Minister to me.

"Copper?" he said, his dark gaze calculating. "And what success, Monsieur? What success have you had in Mahgreb?"

As I gave him a rehearsed spiel about possible pods of chalcopyritic copper ore near Fezzan, I could read his thoughts: Get the international copper corporations in. Get them to construct the mines, to

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build the concentrators and anode furnaces. Then—in a giant step—nationalize them. Far more than a mere journeyman, Abdellatif.

Then he and his lady turned away to chat with other guests, but my evening was going according to plan. First, I'd wanted a direct impression of Abdellatif—sometimes even the briefest personal contact can give an operative valuable insights. Second, I needed to doublecheck a Station report that he invariably dismissed his bodyguards and drove his mistress himself when they were out together. Third, I wanted to finger him for Mustafa.

Mustafa had claimed he could recognize the Minister, but I intended to make sure. Once, a long while ago, I hit the wrong target through a mistaken identification. Result: a wasted life. Wasted effort and a chance for promotion wasted too.

The reception began to break up and I drifted toward the front of the hotel where I stood in the soft night air among guests waiting for their cars. Across the street the usual group of silent onlookers stared curiously. Because there is nothing so anonymous as a jellabah that just clears the ground, its hood shrouding the dark face inside, I could not single out Mustafa.

Just then Abdellatif appeared, his lady at his side, and I joined them. As we chatted idly, I kept an eye out for one of the figures across the street to fold his arms—Mustafa's signal to me.

Then I spotted it and immediately held out my hand to Abdellatif for a parting handshake. As I bowed to his mistress and moved away, a gleaming Mercedes SL sports coupé was driven up. The driver got out so that Abdellatif could take his place behind the wheel. It was a fine sight, really—the strong handsome man, the beautiful woman, the chic car. Pardonably, Abdellatif burned rubber on the take-off.

Moments later a Citroën sedan pulled out of the line of cars and sped after the SL. I got a blurred glimpse of four bulky men in the sedan—a rear guard for the Minister—and a loose end in my plan. Damn lucky I'd doublechecked the Station's report.

When we held what was to have been our final check-off, I informed Mustafa I'd had to modify the plan. The action date was unchanged—two nights from now, after another reception. And his role would remain almost the same. But

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the Minister's rear guard would have to be derailed. Bringing in another operative would force us to change all our emergency plans, our signals and timetables, our escape routes. It was too late for that; I would handle the chore myself.

One other thing had changed, I told Mustafa. He was to use the knife, after all—because, I said, I had acquired great confidence in his skill.

A nod and a slight smile told me my ploy had paid off. It is human to enjoy winning a point from the next higher echelon, and killers are seldom inhuman—at least, not those I select. They, too, work better if they can enjoy a small bureaucratic victory now and then.

He readily accepted my plan to doctor his knife blade with the contents of the D-capsule. Its poison, I knew, was virulent enough to work through the blood stream—more slowly than if it were swallowed, but just as fatally.

"Do more than just nick him," I said. "But this way you won't have to strike more than once." That's the cruel problem with a knife, hitting a vital spot with only one blow. A lot of operations have been blown in a flurry of deflected knife thrusts.

Mustafa smiled. "Time will be saved too." A good man.

"And don't waste the woman." He nodded. We very often thought alike, I had found. He, too, abhorred waste.

I do not really approve of being a direct participant in an op. It is not that I'm cowardly; I am not. Someone, you see, should be free to coordinate movements, to shift alternate plans into gear if necessary, to take managerial responsibility. Or, God help us, to try to pick up the pieces after a blown operation.

And my direct involvement required approval from higher echelons—always a nuisance. I had, of course, immediately requested Slater's approval by my transceiver link to the Station. But his reply was slow in coming. Which meant that he'd had to take the decision upstairs to the Executive Committee.

Waiting on the brink of an operation is the worst time. And, as Slater had said, this was a big operation—there would be a monstrous international brouhaha if it blew. Goodbye career.

I filled in the time getting the rented Simca fine-tuned and practising my part. Mustafa would be doing the same with a battered ten-year-old Fiat 124 he had bought under a false name. Mahgrebians are the fastest bad drivers in the

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world, but all he had to do was to conceal the Fiat near the hairpin turn into the drive of Abdellatif's lady's seaside villa and then, when the SL slowed for the turn, do the job. After that he was free to cut the old car loose toward our beach-house.

It would be tricky taking out the rear guard, but I am a *good* fast driver. The Simca was no Le Mans entry but, tuned up, it was agile, while Citroëns are powerful but sluggish. Tricky, but the odds leaned my way.

Still, I am not inhuman either and the waiting chewed at my nerves. I tried to pass the time sunning myself, tourist-like, on the small patio of the safehouse, the transceiver at my elbow. But I was no tourist and instead of drowsing away the hours I found myself pacing restlessly up and down under the bright Mahgrebian sun.

The day of the reception dawned. I activated the transceiver once again. Still nothing.

At 3:48 P.M. just as I was preparing to signal Mustafa that the op was canceled, the transceiver squawked. Slater's mood showed in his message: *Ex Com so uptight it broke own rule, insisted on full rundown re nuts, bolts, and Mustafa. Finally gave go ahead, but be advised, boy, blow this and you'll be buried. Luck.*

The night was very black and as I charged the Citroën, I flicked the Simca's lights to high beam. Even though blinded, the other driver held his ground. But so did I and at the last possible moment he swerved. As my Simca flew on down the road I heard the crash and knew his car was finished. So that was done.

As I garaged the Simca at the safehouse on the beach I found that my palms were wet. But from experience I knew the reaction was normal and would pass. Leaving the garage door for Mustafa to close behind his Fiat, I went inside where I tossed down a quick shot of cognac. Then, pouring another to sip slowly, I went out on the terrace overlooking the sea to walk my jumping nerves calm again.

When my eyes had accommodated to the dark, I could make out the low gently bobbing silhouette of the jet-boat offshore and silently I toasted the skipper's perfect timing. Soon Mustafa would be safely aboard it and I would be able to wind up the few remaining administrative details.

I heard the Fiat arrrive, and setting down my empty glass I went inside to greet Mustafa. His jellabah had blood on it, his hawk face was drawn, his eyes were wide and very black. "The

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Minister was strong—the woman fought too. Then she broke away and ran for help."

"The job! For God's sake, did you do the job?"

His voice rasped. "It is done." But not, as it turned out, before the dying Abdellatif had ripped the hood from Mustafa's head. "I came here as planned," he said, his chest heaving. "But only to tell you that I cannot leave. The woman saw my face—she must die. And the bone—I must get the bone."

"The bone?" I said blankly. Then it dawned—"You don't mean those damn rings of yours are real?"

His eyes flamed and swiftly I added, "Of course they are. But you can't stay. Never mind the woman. We must stick to the plan."

"No, my friend." His eyes burned into mine as he moved closer. "Do not try to stop me. There remains what you so often warned of—a loose end."

Yes, he and I did think very much alike, we two journeymen. So I could scarcely argue at this point that a loose end need *not* be tied down. But now Mustafa himself had become a loose end.

Anticipating loose ends, especially those that spell disaster, is part of an Action Operative's job. But I had grown rather fond of my fellow journeyman; in fact, my esteem for him had risen when I realized that the white rings on his brown fingers were not cheap substitutes but the real thing. So it was with genuine regret that I raised my closed right hand and shot him just above the left eyebrow.

I could immediately sense that the members of the Executive Committee had broken another rule and had read my report closely. The Englishman's nod was almost friendly, a sign that this cool aristocrat was satisfied with the PR Department's performance, with my performance. "Noteworthy achievement, Corson," he drawled. "All problems resolved. Very tidy."

"Damn right," said the American, absently running a finger along his broken nose. "A K.O. just before the final bell—beautiful, Johnny."

The Frenchman said nothing but I was sure that behind his tinted glasses I could see a gleam of professional admiration. And the German gave me a stiff semi-salute. "Good, Corson. Very good!"

His getting my name right was final proof that I'd succeeded in achieving something memorable. So, relaxing comfortably, I selected a cigar from the silver box the Englishman

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held out to me. It was an H. Upmann, fully deserving of the care I gave to lighting it, and four pairs of eyes watched every move raptly as, puffing delicately, I rotated it in the flame of the German's gold lighter. Yes, I thought, as contentedly I breathed in the rich smoke, it did look as if all problems were resolved—my own included.

But it never pays to be cocksure and as I tenderly transferred the cigar to my left hand, I watched carefully the four pairs of eyes that followed my right hand with respectful attention as I rested it on the table.

Respectful attention. That clinched it. Operation Gimmick—my personal operation—had been touchy, difficult, even bloody, but clearly it had been a success.

I glanced down. My skin was not so dark as Mustafa's but it was browned enough by the Mahgrebian sun to be an effective background for the circlet of white polished bone on my ring finger, and I couldn't resist touching its cool undersurface with the tip of my thumb. And at that moment I felt very close to Mustafa, a skilled journeyman and a man with a sure eye for a notable gimmick.

"Q"

APOLOGY TO READERS

Just before going to press and too late to change the contents and front cover of this issue, we learned that the publishing rights we purchased in Dick Francis' *The Big Story* were not as represented to us. We bought first magazine rights in the United States. We were not informed that the story, under the title of *A Day of Wine and Roses*, had already appeared in the May 7, 1973 issue of "Sports Illustrated." We deeply regret our unintentional misrepresentation.

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Richard Laymon's first story, "Desert Pickup," appeared in our November 1970 issue. His second story for EQMM took a longer than usual time to reach us—four years—but we are genuinely happy he persisted, and we are sure more stories will be coming through at a faster pace.

By sheer coincidence the second story also tells of a pickup—following the breakdown of a car on a lonely road in the dead of night. Any pickup can be dangerous, but this one, after what had happened to her sister . . .

ROADSIDE PICKUP

by RICHARD LAYMON

When the piano stopped, the voice came back. It was soft and friendly, like the music, and kept Colleen's thoughts from dwelling on the empty road. "That was Michel Legrand," it said, almost whispering, "and this is Jerry Bonner bringing you music and talk from midnight till dawn here on easy-listening KS—" She rolled the knob of her car radio and the voice clicked off.

It wouldn't be smart to keep listening. Not smart at all, since there was no telling how long she might be sitting here. Maybe all night. You can't play a radio all night without running down the battery. Or can you? She would have to ask that mechanic tomorrow. Jason. He was so good at explaining things.

She sighed with weariness and pressed her fingertips against her eyelids. If only someone would come along, and stop, and offer to help her.

The way Maggie was helped?

She felt her skin tighten.

No! Not like Maggie!

As Colleen rubbed her bare arms, she started to remember it again—the telephone that rang in her dream until it woke her to the real ringing, the roughness of the bedroom rug under her feet, the cool slick linoleum in the kitchen.

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And all the time the sickening lump of fear in her belly, because the phone just doesn't ring at 3:00 A.M. unless—

"Cut it out," she muttered. "Snap out of it, okay? Think about something pleasant for a change."

Sure, something pleasant.

Otherwise she would start remembering the cop's voice on the phone and the drive to the morgue and the way her sister had looked lying there—

"Shine on, shine on, harvest moon," she started to sing. She kept on singing it. Then she began "Sentimental Journey."

When they were kids they used to sing those songs on long trips. Mother and Father would be sitting up front, she and Maggie in the back, four shadows holding off the lonely night with sweet, half-remembered lyrics.

Maggie always had lots of trouble remembering the words. Whenever she got stuck, she would listen to the others and sing out the right words a moment later, like a cheery echo.

The night her car broke down, nobody was there to sing her the right words.

Colleen caught her breath. A light! A speck of light no bigger than one of the stars high above the cornfields moved in her side mirror. A car was coming.

Would this one stop? Three, so far, had whooshed by without even slowing down. Three in almost as many hours.

Maybe one of them had stopped, somewhere farther on, and phoned the state troopers.

The headlights of the approaching car were set low and close together. Not like a patrol car, more like a sports car.

She flashed her lights on and off, on and off.

"Stop," she whispered. "Please stop."

As the car bore down, Colleen squinted at the glaring slab of her mirror. It hurt to look, but she didn't take her eyes away, not even when the headlights exploded across the mirror in a final brilliant flash.

After the painful brightness the soft glow of the tail lights felt soothing to her eyes.

When the brake lights flashed, something clutched the inside of Colleen's stomach. She hunched over to ease the pain and saw the cold, white backup lights come on.

Her hand trembled as she rolled up her window. She glanced across her shoulder. The lock button was down. Swinging her eyes to the passenger door, she saw that it too was locked.

The car stopped inches from her bumper.

Colleen filled her lungs with

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air and let it out slowly.

A sports car, all right—small and shiny, with the canvas top of a convertible.

The driver's door swung open.

Colleen's breath made raspy, heartbeat sounds in her throat. Her mouth was parched. Did Maggie feel this way the night she died? She must have. This way, only a lot worse.

A tall slim man stepped out. He looked to be in his late twenties, close to Colleen's age. His hair was fashionably long, his checkered sports shirt was open at the throat, his trousers flared at the cuffs.

She couldn't see his lean dark face until he bent down and smiled in at her. She nervously returned the smile. Then the stranger raised his hand into view and made a circular cranking motion.

Colleen nodded. She lowered her window half an inch.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, speaking directly into the slit. His breath, so close to her, smelled sweet and heavy with liquor.

"It's . . . I'm not sure."

"Something the matter with your car? Your car break down?"

His breath filled her nostrils. She gripped the window crank and told herself to roll it up —roll it up *now* because he's been drinking . . . and she saw the dead battered face of her sister.

"You all right?" the man asked.

She rubbed her face. "I'm feeling kind of woozy, I guess."

"You ought to roll down your window, get some fresh air."

"No, thanks."

"The fresh air would do you good."

"I'm all right."

"If you say so. What's wrong with your car?"

"It overheated."

"What?"

"Overheated," she said into the window's gap. "I was driving along, and a red light on the dashboard came on, and then the engine started to make some kind of awful whiny sound, so I pulled over."

"I'd better have a look."

He walked to the front of the car and touched the hood the way a person touches something that might be hot. Then he slipped his hands under the hood's lip. He couldn't get it open. Finally he crouched, found the latch, and opened it.

He spent only a few moments under the hood before returning to Colleen's window. "You've got a problem," he said.

"What's wrong?"

"What? I can hardly hear you. If you'd just roll down your window a bit more—"

"Roll it down?"

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"Sure."

"No, I don't think so."

"Hey, I don't bite," he said, grinning and shaking his head.

Colleen smiled back at him. "Are you sure?"

"I only bite when there's a full moon. It's only a half moon tonight."

"A gibbous," she corrected.

The man laughed and said, "Either way."

Colleen opened the window and breathed deeply. The breeze tasted wet with the freshness of the cornfields. A train, far away, was making a snickity sound. Somewhere a rooster heralded dawn three hours early.

It's a beautiful night, she thought. For a moment she wondered if the stranger was also thinking about the peaceful sounds and smells. She looked at him. "What's wrong with my car?"

"Fan belt."

"Fan belt? What does that mean?"

He moved his face down closer to hers. "It means, young lady, that it's a good thing you stopped."

"Why's that?" she asked, and turned away from his liquored breath.

"If you go far without a fan belt, you burn up your engine. *Kaput,* kiss your motor goodbye."

"That serious?"

"That serious."

"What could've happened to the belt?"

"It probably just broke. They do that sometimes. Me, I change mine every two years just to be on the safe side."

"I wish *I* had."

"I'm glad you didn't," he said, and grinned a charming, boyish grin that frightened Colleen. "It isn't every night," he continued, "that I'm lucky enough to run into a damsel in distress. Especially one as pretty as you."

She rubbed her perspiring hands on her skirt. "Can you —can you fix it?"

"Your car? Not a chance. Not unless you've got a new fan belt in your pocket."

"What'll I do?"

"You'll let me give you a lift to the nearest service station. Or somewhere else, if you'd prefer. Where would you like to go?"

"Well, I don't think I should—"

"You can't stay here."

"Well—"

"It would be foolish to stay here—a woman as pretty as you. I don't want to alarm you, but there've been a number of attacks on this road—"

"I know," she said.

"Not to mention half a dozen murders. Men and women both."

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"You've alarmed me." She smiled nervously. "I'll come with you."

"That's what I like to hear." He reached into the car, unlocked the door, and opened it for her. She climbed out. When he shut the door, it made a dull thump that sounded very final.

"Do you live far from here?" he asked, taking Colleen's elbow with cold, firm fingers and leading her toward his car.

"Thirty miles, maybe."

"So close? Why don't you let me take you home?"

"That would be very nice. But I hate to put you to the trouble. If we can find a gas station—"

"No trouble. Thirty miles is nothing." He stopped walking. His fingers tightened around her arm. "I guess I'd be willing to drive a woman like you just about anywhere."

She saw the way he smiled and she knew it was happening.

"Let go of me," she said, trying to sound calm.

But he didn't let go. He jerked her arm. As she stumbled toward him the back of his free hand stung her cheek.

"Please!"

He mashed his mouth against hers.

Colleen closed her eyes. She started to remember it again —the telephone that rang her awake, the long walk to the kitchen, the rough apologetic voice of the cop.

I'm afraid that somebody assaulted your sister.

Is she–?

She's gone.

Gone. A funny way for a cop to put it.

She bit the stranger's lip. Her forehead snapped against his nose. She jabbed her knuckles into his throat and felt his larynx collapse. Then she ran back to her car.

By the time Colleen returned to the man, he was lying motionless on the road. Kneeling beside him, she lifted his hand and searched for a pulse. There was none.

She dropped the hand, stood up, and took a deep, deep breath. The breeze off the cornfields smelled so fresh and sweet. So peaceful. Yet there was something a little sad about the smell, as if the cornfields, too, missed Maggie.

Colleen stifled a sob. She glanced at the luminous face of her wrist watch. Then she bent under the hood with her wrench and fan belt, and got to work.

It took her less than six minutes to complete the job.

Not bad.

Faster than ever before.

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beginning a NEW Petrella series by

MICHAEL GILBERT

first publication in the United States

Welcome back, Petrella, in a double new series—some older stories that have never previously been published in the United States, and some brand-new adventures in detection only recently written by Michael Gilbert. The first to appear is one of the older stories, when Petrella was still a Detective Constable. It is a tale full of heart and human understanding—and police work. "Most police work," Petrella believed, "was knowledge—knowledge of an infinity of small everyday facts, unimportant by themselves, deadly when taken together" . . .

WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND?

by MICHAEL GILBERT

To Superintendent Haxtell, education was something you dodged at school and picked up afterward as you went along.

"All I need in my job," he would say, "I learned in the street."

And he would glare down at Detective Petrella, whom he had once found improving his mind with Dr. Bentley's *Dissertation on Fallacies* at a time when he should have been thumbing his way through the current number of *Hue & Cry*.

Petrella was, of course, an unusual Detective Constable. He spoke three languages—one of them was Arabic, for he had been brought up in Egypt; he knew about subjects like viniculture and the theory of the five-lever lock; and he had an endlessly inquiring mind.

The Superintendent approved of that. "Curiosity," he said. "Know your people. If you don't know, ask questions. Find out. It's better than book learning."

Petrella accepted the rebuke in good part. There was a lot of

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truth in it. Most police work was knowledge—knowledge of an infinity of small everyday facts, unimportant by themselves, deadly when taken together.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the Superintendent, Petrella retained an obstinate conviction that there were other things as well, deeper things and finer things: colors, shapes, and sounds of absolute beauty, unconnected with the world of small people in small houses in gray streets. And while in one pocket of his old raincoat he might carry Moriarty's *Police Law,* in the other would lie, dog-eared with use, the *Golden Treasury* of Palgrave.

"She walks in beauty, like the night Of cloudless climes and starry skies," said Petrella, and, "That car's been there a long time. If it's still there when I come back it might be worth looking into."

He was on his way to Lavender Alley to see a man called Parkoff about a missing bicycle. It was as he was walking down Barnaby Passage that he forgot poetry and remembered he was a policeman.

For something was missing. Something as closely connected with Barnaby Passage as mild with bitter or bacon with eggs. The noise of the Harrington children at play.

There were six of them, and Barnaby Passage, which ran alongside their back garden, was their stamping ground. On the last occasion that Petrella had walked through it, a well-aimed potato had carried away his hat, and he had turned in time to see the elfin face of Mickey Harrington disappear behind a row of dustbins. He had done nothing about it, first because it did not befit the dignity of a plainclothes detective to chase a small boy, and secondly because he would not have had the smallest chance of catching him.

Even when not making themselves felt, the Harrington family could always be heard. Were they at school? No, too late. In bed? Much too early. Away somewhere? The Harrington family rarely went away. And if by any chance they had moved, that was something he ought to know about, for they were part of his charge.

Six months ago he had helped to arrest Tim Harrington. It had taken three of them to do it. Tim had fought because he knew what was coming to him. It was third time unlucky and he was due for a full stretch.

Mrs. Harrington had shown only token resentment at this sudden removal of her husband

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for a certain nine and a possible twelve years. He was a man who took a belt to his children and a boot to his women. Not only when he was drunk, which would have been natural, if not forgivable, but with cold ferocity when sober.

Petrella paused at the corner where the blank walls of Barnaby Passage opened out into Barnaby Row. It was at that moment that a line of Rossetti came into his head. *Who has seen the wind?* he murmured to himself. *Neither you nor I.*

A casement rattled up and an old woman pushed out her head. "Lookin' for someone?"

"Er, good evening, Mrs. Minter," said Petrella politely. "I wasn't going to—that's to say, I wondered what had happened to Mrs. Harrington. You can usually hear her family."

"Noisy little beggars," said Mrs. Minter. But she said it without feeling. Children and flies, hope and despair and dirt and love and death: she had seen them all from her little window.

"I wondered if they'd gone away."

"They're home," said Mrs. Minter. "And Mrs. Harrington." Her eyes were button-bright.

"Well, thank you," said Petrella. His mouth felt dry now that he found his suspicions suddenly confirmed.

"You're welcome," said Mrs. Minter.

As Petrella turned away he heard the window slamming down and the click of the catch.

He climbed the steps. Signs of calamity were all about him: the brass dolphin knocker unpolished, the steps unwhited. A lace curtain twitched in the front window, and behind the curtain something stirred.

Petrella knocked. He had lifted the knocker a second time when it was snatched out of his hand by the sudden opening of the door, and Mrs. Harrington stood there.

She was still the ghost of the pretty girl Tim Harrington had married ten years before, but life and rough usage had sandpapered her down to something finer and smaller than nature had ever intended. Her fair hair was drawn tightly over her head and all her girl's curves were turning into planes and angles.

Usually she managed a smile for Petrella, but today there was nothing behind her eyes but emptiness.

"Can I come in?" he asked.

"Well—yes, all right."

She made no move. Only when Petrella actually stepped toward her did she half turn to let him past her, up the dark narrow hall.

"How are the children?" he

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asked—and saw for himself. The six Harrington children were all in the front room, and all silent. The oldest boy and girl were making a pretense of reading books, but the four younger ones were just sitting and staring.

"You're very quiet," he said. "Has the scissor. man come along and cut all your tongues out?"

The oldest boy tried out a grin. It wasn't a very convincing grin, but it lasted long enough for Petrella to see some freshly dried blood inside the lip.

I can smell tiger, he thought. The brute's here all right. He must have made his break this afternoon. If it had been any earlier, the news would have reached the station before I left it.

"I'd like a word with you," he said. "Perhaps you could ask the children to clear out for a moment." He looked at the door which led, as he knew, into the kitchen.

"Not in there," she said quickly. "Out into the hall."

Now that he knew, it was obvious. The smallest boy had his eyes glued to the kitchen door in a sort of dumb horror.

They shuffled out into the hall. Petrella said softly, "I'm not sure you shouldn't go too. There's going to be trouble."

She looked at him with sudden understanding. Then she said, in a loud rough voice, "I don't know what you're talking about. If you've got anything to say, say it and get out. I got my work to do."

"All right," said Petrella. "If you want to play it that way."

He was moving as he spoke. The door to the kitchen was a fragile thing. He ran at it, at the last moment swinging his foot up so that the sole of his heavy shoe landed flat and hard, an inch below the handle.

The door jumped backward, hit something that was behind it, and checked. Petrella slid through the opening.

Tim Harrington was on his knees on the floor. The door edge had cut open his head, and on his stupid face he had the look of a boxer when the ring gets up and hits him.

Petrella fell on top of him. He was giving away too much in weight and strength and fighting experience for any sort of finesse. Under his weight Harrington flattened for a moment, then braced himself, and bucked.

Petrella had his right arm in a lock round the man's neck, and hung on. Steel fingers tore at his arm, plucked it away, and the lumpy body jerked again, and straightened. Next moment they were both on

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their feet, glaring at each other.

In the front room the woman was screaming steadily, and a growing clamor showed that the street was astir. But in the tiny kitchen it was still a private fight.

Harrington swung on his heel and made for the window into the garden. For a moment Petrella was tempted. Then he jumped for the big man's legs, and they were down on the floor again, squirming and fighting and groping.

There was only one end to that. The bigger man carried all the guns. First he got Petrella by the hair and thumped his head on the linoleum. Then he shambled to his feet and, as Petrella turned onto his knees, swung a boot.

If it had landed squarely, that would have been the end of Petrella as a policeman, and maybe as a man as well; but he saw it coming and rolled to avoid it. And in the moment that it missed him, he plucked at the other foot. Harrington came down and in his fall brought the kitchen table with him. A bowl of drippings rolled onto the floor, spilling its brown contents in a slow and loving circle. Petrella, on his knees, watched it, fascinated.

Then he realized that he was alone.

His mind was working well enough to bring him to his feet but his legs seemed to have an existence of their own. They took him out into the front room, which was empty, and then into the hall.

He was dimly aware of the children, all staring at him, all silent. The door was open. In the street footsteps, running.

"You won't catch him now," said Mrs. Harrington.

He turned his head to look at her, and the sudden movement seemed to clear his brain. "I'm going after him," he said. "Ring the police."

Then he was out in the street, and running. Mrs. Minter shouted, "Down there, mister," and pointed. He stumbled, and righted himself. Harrington was already disappearing round the corner. Petrella shambled after him.

When he got to the corner there was one car in the road ahead of him and no one in sight. The car was moving, accelerating, a big blue four-door sedan. Too far away to see the license number.

"Gone away!"

A second car drew up behind him, and a voice said politely, "Is there anything wrong?"

Petrella became aware that he was standing, swaying, in the middle of the road. Behind him, its hood inches from his

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back, was a neat little sports car in two shades of green, driven by a fat young man with fair hair and a Brigade-of-Guards mustache.

"Police," said Petrella. "Got to get that car. It's stolen."

The blue sedan was turning into High Street now. "Move over. I'll drive."

"Hop in," said the young man. "You don't look too fit. I'd better do the driving. It's a tricky little bus, this, till you get the hang of it."

"All right," muttered Petrella. "But quick."

The young man took him at his word. The little car jumped forward like a horse at the touch of a spur. They cornered into High Street, under the nose of a bus, and shot down the middle of the crowded road.

The young man hardly seemed to have moved in his seat. He handled his car like a craftsman, insolently exact, both careful and careless at the same time.

"Right fork ahead. He's going up to the Heath, I think."

"His neck'll be for sale if he does much more of *that,*" said the young man calmly. The blue sedan had pulled out, charged past a bus, and only just got back again ahead of the oncoming truck.

"I say," said Petrella, "you can drive."

"Done a good deal of it," said the man. "Rally stuff mostly, a bit on the track. Name of Blech."

Petrella placed him then.

Time came, and time went, and they were off the Heath and making for the maze of small streets which fills the triangle between Hampstead, Regent's Park, and Camden Town.

"I'm a bit too light to ram him," said Blech. "No need, really. All we have to do is keep in sight. He'll do himself soon."

It happened as he was speaking. The road went up in a hump over the Canal. The blue sedan hit the rise so fast that it almost took off, came down threshing and screaming, went into a long sideways skid, hit the low parapet, and toppled over.

Blech came neatly to a halt, and Petrella was out, and running again.

The blue car was standing on its nose in three feet of water and mud, sinking ponderously. Petrella got the rear door open, and pulled. Behind him, Blech pulled. As the car fell away, the bulk of Tim Harrington tumbled back on top of them.

Petrella seized him by the hair and hammered his head on the towpath.

He felt a restraining hand on his arm, and the mists cleared

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again for a moment. "I think," said Blech, "that you're being rather too—er—vigorous with him. What he wants is first aid, really."

"Sorry," said Petrella. "Not thinking very straight. Fact is, I think I'm a bit concussed myself."

"That makes two of you. If you helped, we might get him into my car."

They did this, between them. The street slept in a timeless summer's evening doze. From first to last no other person appeared on the scene.

"Where to now?"

Petrella tried to think. Harrington was out cold. There was a big purple bruise on one side of his forehead, and an occasional bubble formed in the corner of his open mouth. He was a hospital case. But no hospital would take him in without explanations. Nor would any other police station.

"Home," he said. "The way we came. It'll be quicker in the long run."

They drove home decorously, back up onto the Heath, and west, with the setting sun in their eyes. For a few seconds Petrella dozed. That wouldn't do. No time to sleep. Job not finished. Better talk and keep awake.

"It's very good of you," he said, "to take all this trouble."

"Enjoyed it," said Blech. "What is he?"

"He's an escaped convict," said Petrella. "Named Harrington. Not exactly a pleasant character."

"How did you cotton on to him?"

How had he? It was so many years ago. A great gale was singing through his head, a mighty diapason of sound that came and went. "It was Rossetti put me on to him," he said, as the gale dropped for a moment.

"Rossetti? *The Blessed Damozel–*"

"Not Dante Gabriel, Christina. *Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I: But when the trees bow down their heads The wind is passing by.* Fork left here."

"That's nice," said Blech. "Is there any more of it?"

"Who has seen the wind? Neither I nor you: But when the leaves hang trembling The wind is passing through." That was it. Hang trembling. It was the children that had made him certain. Sitting there like drugged mice.

"I must remember that," said Blech. "Here we are, I think. You'd better get some help to carry out our passenger. And then you ought to lie down, I think."

Superintendent Haxtell reck-

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oned that he was beyond surprise, but the events of that evening tried him hard. First, there came two stalwart constables, supporting the drooping figure of a convict of whose escape in transit from one prison to another he had only just been notified; secondly, a diffident figure, whose face he vaguely recognized from the columns of the popular press; and, bringing up the rear, his shirt torn open to the waist, his face rimmed with blood and dried dripping, Detective Petrella.

When he had sorted things out a bit, he sat down to make his report.

Plainly it was a case that reflected the greatest credit on all concerned. And a lot of it must, and should go to Petrella. And, according to Petrella, Blech had behaved very well. A foreigner, but a good chap. So far so good.

But what the Superintendent couldn't make out was exactly what credit was to be given to a person named Rossetti. Sounded like some sort of Italian. Some further inquiries needed there. His pen scratched busily . . .

"Q"

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a *NEW* story by

JOHN PIERCE

Much has been written about the quality *of plot in fiction. Not too much has been written about the* quantity *of plot in fiction. How much plot should there be in a short-short of 1500 to 2500 words? How much in a short story of 5000 to 7000 words? In a novelet of 10,000 to 15,000 words? In a short novel of 35,000 words? In a novel of 50,000 words or more? Opinions will differ, of course—some readers (and critics) prefer style to substance; others like their stories fully packed.*

Here is the story of the fully packed variety. And yet note how the author, the gifted John Pierce, meshing substance and style, cunningly controls his plot material, artfully releases its details until the whole truth is slowly, inexorably revealed . . .

WALKING HUBERT DOWN

by JOHN PIERCE

Four of them studied Spanish in a small town in Mexico. They had dark airless rooms in the Hotel Espléndido and took classes in the mornings at the *Alianza*. Evenings they could be seen on a stone bench near the bandstand in the Plaza. There they blinked and scratched themselves and waited for the Main Event. She appeared with no regularity in any of several fine cars. She was Pamela Sykes-Coddington, the tungsten heiress, sometime film starlet and international beauty queen.

Multiple marriages had but ripened her. She wore the surname of her latest husband, a departed Englishman of means. To him they attributed her rather droll, rather touchingly pretentious British accent. Or she could have, perhaps as easily, absorbed it in drama school (she was briefly visible in a pair of Japanese late-show monster films).

She lived in the hills above

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the Pacific not far from Acapulco, but it was in Ecija, the village where they (on veterans' benefits) attended classes, that she was most often seen. And they—Farrow, Dewey, Sprague, and the repellent Griggs—watched intently as that lissome figure with string shopping bag made its silken rounds of the knick-knack and liquor stores. They studied her nubile locomotion and devised orgiastic dreams.

All were surprised when Masden Farrow married her. Farrow, too, was surprised. He met her in a used-book shop one morning and took her to coffee with his last 163 pesos. She Mercedes-Benzed him through the hills to her blinding white establishment above the cove where rode her white yacht. They lunched on her terrace, swam in her natural-rock pool, drank her liquor, suppered among her fireflies and drank anew, and were wedded in a simple secret four A.M. ceremony—this in less than a day.

We are in the late summer of the middle sixties. You may have read of it: misplaced love and conjugal perfidy; blood on a white carpet and the inexcusable behavior of Edward Griggs. The cleric who joined them, an unshaved retired Idahoan dredged up by her from the American colony in the predawn, took generous payment and was chauffeured back down the hill.

They trudged up the marble stairs to her seaside bedroom with a fresh pail of champagne to toast the morn. Their slurred repartee calved silly laughter. They slept and woke to new champagne. On the bedside table were airplane tickets to Nassau for late tonight or the following morning —whenever, she now interjected, they had disposed of her father.

"Repeat?" said Farrow. He was fastening the belt of a yellow silk robe, the property, he assumed, of Cecil Sykes-Coddington. "Dispose of father, you said?"

"Yes, he's flying in from Schenectady this evening, dolling. I'm sure I explained."

"Did you?" Very little was clear to him.

She said, "Then listen carefully now. This is most important. For the brief while that dad is here tonight I must ask that you pose as Hubert W. Poundstone."

"Say again? Didn't get you."

She repeated the instructions.

"Who is Hubert W. Poundstone?"

"Oh, Masden," she lamented. "I *told* you all this last night."

"Told me what?"

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"I told you painstakingly. I said. I thought about three weeks ago I was going to marry Hubert."

"And didn't?"

"Now, how could I have? I married you."

"Ah, yes," he said. "Go ahead."

"Everything was arranged. We were driving off to get married. We stopped off at a restaurant in Chilpancingo so I could telephone father to give him some good news for a change. Father's been awfully *miffed* at me. So I laid it on like fertilizer—how happy I was, how this was forever, how fine and steady Hubert was. 'Hubert's put it all together,' I said. And dad was happy. And when I went back to the car—*my* car, my *Bentley*—Hubert had picked up some waitress and driven off."

"Why, the skunk."

"To put it lightly. I had to hire a taxi back. *Couldn't* call home again. Couldn't *do* that to father. Result, he thinks we —Hubert and I—*are* married. He sent us that damned yacht as a wedding gift. He's flying in tonight. So tonight you're Hubert."

Cloudily Farrow recalled lingering over a portrait on the bureau before they slept. The portrait was no longer visible. "I thought that was your latest ex, Sykes-Coddington, in the picture."

"What picture? What *are* you talking about?"

"Portrait on the bureau."

"No, no, that was Hubert. I threw it away. Threw *him* away. That's all over. He's gone to Hong Kong."

"Who has?"

"*Pound*stone."

"Where is Sykes-Coddington?"

"My God, how do I know? Merrie England, I suppose."

"Do continue."

"I said it's father's periodic audit of my life, Masden. He'll look things over, satisfy himself I've at last got a decent marriage, and make provision for our needs for the year ahead."

Dawn pinked the balustrade outside the walk-in windows and touched the white hull of the yacht below. "We have needs?"

"Of course we do, dumbbell. I live off the proceeds of capital I can't touch till I'm thirty."

"And you've exhausted said yearly proceeds by July?"

"Every ruble. Don't look so obtuse. It's nothing; it's a tedious ritual dance we perform semiannually. It gives dad the most vulgar sense of power and of being loved. Nudging people around is what he understands. He wants this time to evaluate my husband; there've been

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some that didn't work."

Farrow's mind fought its traces. Only now, sobering, did the incongruity of this—his marriage to a nymph millionairess—present itself as a phenomenon to be analyzed.

"And I'm to be Hubert Poundstone."

"Well, if dad finds out you're not he'll be back at that Acapulco airport before I can mix him a loaded drink."

"Describe Poundstone."

"Tall, rotund, conceited, overbearing. It has nothing to do with anything. I said father's never laid eyes on Hubert, never will."

"If I must," Farrow said tepidly.

"Oh, but you definitely must. Let's face it, dolling, as Masden Farrow of the G.I. Bill at age thirty you're hardly the social or financial catch of the summer season. Go to sleep. Get yourself some cash from one of those bureau drawers when you wake up. Look through the garage for a car you like and drive down to a good store in Ecija for some decent clothes."

"What sort would Hubert wear?"

"Please don't start making things difficult, dolling. I'm getting the most awful headache. Get anything that isn't army surplus and torn tennis shoes. And do *not* rush to tell your local schoolmates about this. If the wire services get it and father reads it before getting here—well, he just won't get here."

No father, no money? Farrow pondered it and slept until noon. He rose and showered. Petty cash in large bills stuck out from the bureau drawers. He dressed and left Pamela prettily *non compos* in her bare flesh and large black eyeshades. On the terrace he received breakfast from a portly smiling servant named Pilar.

He went to the garage and selected a Tsetse-Fly GTX-400C 3.8 bearing British plates and slipped down the winding asphalt to Ecija. At a clothing shop well removed from his hotel and student haunts he picked out a small but respectable beginner's wardrobe. He gave them his own clothes to present to charity and, in maroon slacks, white sandals, aloha shirt, black glasses, and yachting cap, debouched into the bright sunlight with armfuls of wares.

He was not halfway to the Tsetse-Fly when he smelled it—the sour dreadful odor of Edward Griggs's socks. Griggs was waiting in the passenger seat for him, his wise smirk too exultant to be controlled.

Farrow threw the boxes into the jump seat. "Griggs."

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Griggs showed his yellow teeth in a grin. "We were wondering if you'd forgotten your old pals."

He was shorter than Farrow, but fat and heavier. His complexion was coarse and pinkish. Horrid local toilet waters failed to compensate for his disinclination to bathe. He used a cloying, grease-based tonic on his unwashed blond hair.

"Pals?" Farrow asked.

"Share and share alike; you know our motto."

"Do I? No, I didn't know we had a 'motto.' Certainly never heard it from you." He had the keys in the ignition but Griggs made no move to disembark.

"Back to the big snow-white hacienda?" Griggs asked.

"Beat it, Griggs. Find your own girl."

Griggs chuckled. "Girl or wife?" he purred. "I know you got married to her."

Farrow felt an arctic chill. "Who said that?"

"Well, now, you didn't show up at class yesterday or at the hotel last night and I got sort of worried. I know a little friend of a housemaid who's an in-law of a gardener at Pamela's. An old technique of mine—con one of these local girls into thinking you might take them to the States, you can get anything." This last he gave gamy significance with his vulpine grin.

Farrow looked tiredly at him. All Griggs's character assessments ended on some variation of "get." "That Kepelhoff is a good guy; he'll do anything in the world for you," Griggs would say.

An armada of swirling flies announced the grand arrival of the ice-cream vendor. A wobbly wheeled burro cart supporting a gross, dirty, shaveless man hove to. When small children came running he blew his nose, wiped grimy hands on his stained trousers, and began to issue cones.

Farrow shuddered. The scene evoked the squalor of that rancid bedbug hotel from which he had by sheer miracle escaped. Everything about it, like Griggs, induced a leaden vertigo.

"Well," he said, "nice seeing you, but right now I've got to go."

"I thought you might invite me up."

"No. We just got married at dawn."

"Maybe I'd like a nice lunch too," Griggs whined. "Meet someone from the upper classes for a change. Have a few drinks and bat some ideas around."

"That sounds stimulating, but not today. I've got to go."

Griggs shook his head dolorously. "I surely would like to meet her."

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"*No,* Griggs, you can't. Some other time. Right now I'm hurrying back to try," he lied, "to get her on a plane to Mexico City for the day. She has things to do there."

"On her wedding day?" He smiled.

"Do I have to throw you out of here?"

Smiling, Griggs dug a limp Fatima cigarette from his spotted plaid jacket. "I was worried about Saenz, the *hotelero.* Knowing you'd moved out, he might start handing out your stuff willy-nilly, so I put it all in my room for safekeeping."

"Find anything you needed?"

"Something fell out."

"I'll bet it did," Farrow began, but then disintegrated. Something uninvited had taken lodgment in his skull; it was his spine up there, coiled compactly as an eel.

He knew what Griggs, prowling in Farrow's luggage, had found. Among his papers was a Las Vegas wedding certificate dated six or seven years ago. In those days he had the means to drink too much. Her name was, regrettably, Mary Smith. She was a shill in a gambling club where he'd won $30. Somehow he married her. Two days later he lost her in a Los Angeles bus terminal. Never saw her or heard from her or of her again. Did not know where she came from. Could never find her for divorce purposes. Maybe she was dead. "That's been over," he said.

"Over how? She never divorced you or you her. Nobody ever had the dough to hire people to find the other one, or so you said one night."

"I said that?"

"That night you got the insurance refund and we did all that drinking."

Farrow sighed. "So all right, Griggs, what's your angle?"

"There's no angle."

"Come on, you're too dumb to be subtle. We all know you. What are you planning, to take that piece of paper up to Pamela? She'll laugh in your face."

"I doubt if the Mexican cops would. Bigamy in a Catholic country?"

"It has nothing to do with Mexico," Farrow argued inanely. "The guy was a U.S. nondenominational minister."

"Operating in Mexico."

"Okay. You, wedding certificate, cops. Is that it?"

"No, what I said was, if any of the rest of us had fallen into something good *we'd* have shared."

"The day anyone authorizes you to include yourself in their 'we'—all right, so you take it to the cops and then sit there in triumph while you count up the

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nothing that's left to share, is that it?" Farrow drummed the wheel in the sour smell and watched the ice-cream vendor pull away. How (abed this morning) he had rejoiced at being clear of it—lumpy bedding and perspiration and dirty toilets and Griggs. Years of nothing, then deliverance—and now Griggs again. One thing only would be worse: consignment for half a lifetime to the mud floor of a village jail.

He had roughly 3000 pesos—or $240—left from the clothing appropriation. With wife Pamela he would be on that Nassau flight tonight or tomorrow morning—beyond Griggs, beyond local jurisdiction. He gave Griggs 2000 pesos. "This is on condition you try to keep your mouth shut for a couple of days," he said. "Her father is coming down. You spread this news around and I'll guarantee you there'll be instant disinheritance problems—for her, for me, for you."

"De acuerdo," quoted Griggs from their textbook.

"I'm serious about this. I'm telling you. Blow your mouth off about this and there's nothing. Zero."

"Convenido." Done.

"Split some of that money with Sprague and Dewey. They haven't got a dime between them. And now I've got to go."

"No need to be huffy," Griggs said from the sidewalk. "All we expect is a modest share."

"I'll ask Dewey later how much of it you shared with them." His tires threw gravel getting away. He lacked the composure for that perilous, climbing road. The rage at the thought of Griggs in his luggage dimmed his eyesight. He drove a few blocks to a small prim bar. Inside it was quiet, cool, and mahogany. Keeping the barman awake was a lone gringo philosopher drinking dacquiries. Farrow ordered a cognac. He could not chase the stench of Griggs's socks from his sinuses. They had poisoned the air through the Hotel Espléndido.

Disconsolately he tapped his glass for a second cognac. He had everything or he had nothing, contingent on his playing ball with Edward Griggs. He should never have come down to Ecija in a $20,000 car. He should have sent for his luggage.

Three cognacs diluted his anger and he previsioned Nassau. Idly he contemplated the mirror behind the serried bottles. In that mirror the Englishman two stools from him read his considerable mail. He was small and wiry with a military mustache and receding brownish hair. He finished with

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his correspondence and swept it aside. He took up the local newspaper and looked it over. In the mirror he caught Farrow's vacant eyes.

"Bit of a glaze on the sea this morning," he said cheerily. "Care for a look at the paper? What's bloody Osgood doing in the bloody Grand Prix?"

Farrow had quit reading newspapers.

"Bit depressing, eh? Fishwick," he said, extending his hand. "Farrow? Yes. Knew a chap named Farrow once. Can't think where. No, erase. Friend of mine knew him. Any relatives in Algiers?"

Farrow thought not.

"Just as well. The Farrow my friend knew was a bit dotty. Claimed 'Farrow' derived from Pharoah. Studied Egyptian land records. Instigated legal claims. Then, too, there was a Farrer, from Dorking where I once lived. Dead at the turn of the century, long before my time. Offspring? Let me think . . ."

Farrow nodded and smiled at the monologue that followed, though he did not hear the words. Griggs weighed upon him; he needed drink, not conversation. When next Fishwick departed for the door marked *Caballeros,* Farrow glanced at the mail beside him. There were ten or twelve envelopes—all addressed to Cecil Sykes-Coddington, Esq., c/o *Correspondencia General,* Acapulco, Gro., Mexico. Definitely not the man in the portrait on Pamela's bureau, but her ex-husband he was.

Farrow came off the bar in all directions. The Tsetse-Fly with British plates was visible from the window. Sykes-Coddington's car? He tipped the bartender and quickly made his exit.

He regained the automobile. *It* was his error. Better to have come to town by oxcart, or on foot. Who in town didn't know the car? It spelled Pamela.

"Hola, Farrow!" screeched the voice of rusted steel as a woman ran toward him in her high heels. *"Ay, Farrow, me debes dos mil pesos!"*

Owe you 2000 nothing, he muttered, and shot forward with a howl of burning rubber. Clever tart. Posing as a nice girl and handing him a bill. Her name was Lucrecia. He left her shouting and waving angry arms. *"Dorty peeg!"*

They had late lunch on the terrace. They spoke perfunctory, mid-afternoon words and heard somewhere the snip of a gardener's shears. Farrow's sorties into levity did not fool her. "Badders, dolling?" she asked.

"If not bad a little spicy."

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She exposed her pink tongue at the guacamole. "Tell mama."

"I sat next to a guy in a bar a while ago. He was reading his mail. The addressee on the envelopes was Cecil Sykes-Coddington."

The pink tongue froze. "*Describe* him."

This was done.

"Well, *blast* the man," she exploded. Her wine overturned on the tablecloth and Farrow's trousers. Smoldering, she watched the maid Pilar in a chiding mop-up. "Bloody, bloody," she said. "I should have known."

"Yes."

"His showing up. He keeps showing up. Showing up, showing up. When I divorced him I hadn't much cash to give him, that's why."

"I thought he was a big businessman."

"He was, till we married. My husbands all quit their jobs and take a bottle to bed." She pushed her food away in favor of the cigarette which she smoked in incisive, angry breaths. "Let's figure this dreadful nonsense out. Cecil knows I'd planned a meeting with father about this time of year. He damn well knows I never married Hubert. He'll undoubtedly be royally smashed by evening. Drunk he's impossible. No, we can't have him bumbling up here."

"Would he bumble up?"

"When he's drinking?" She gestured fatigue. "He wasn't sticky about the break-up, but he'd thrown away his source of income. I told him I'd help him along later if we could just prevent a lot of newspaper mishmash reaching father."

"Something strange is going on. He's using the name 'Fishwick.' That's how he introduced himself."

She regarded him sharply. "Don't tell me you sat there and had a *conversation* with him?"

"To answer, yes and no."

"But of course he'd have to be Fishwick. Or Turner or Goines or something equally dull. He's a jump ahead of about fifty bill collectors."

"And your problem is his showing up loaded and spoiling our domestic charade for your dad."

"My problem, *your* problem. Or even worse. He's just too unpredictable. Foul temper, bitter about money, there's just no telling." She stood abruptly. "I've got to go find him, that's all. You didn't notice the rest of the address on those envelopes."

"*Correspondencia General,* Acapulco. General Delivery."

"Good old Cecil. Better waiting in a general delivery line

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like some shipping clerk than giving people the name of an un-chic hotel. Tell me how to find this bar where you saw him."

Chicanery on a large scale, Farrow deduced, was like stomping out a grassfire in a shifting wind. There was Griggs, there was Sykes-Coddington, and there was Lucrecia, and he and Pamela hadn't been married twelve hours. With relief he watched Pamela scoot away. While she dealt with Sykes-Coddington he could run down and defer Lucrecia, the public lady. She did business from an ornate room in the Hotel De Oro, a nomenclature she celebrated with a largess of golden teeth.

It was isolated; it was deluxe; it hung grimly to a cliff above the sea. Better run down to the hotel. Better anything than have her burst in here at supper time squawling for her fee. It was a human error, a linguistic misunderstanding. The kind of thing one's (male) company might chuckle over while one showed one's vacation film slides in Duluth. Briefly Farrow had, a year ago, accompanied Lucrecia to her pleasure chamber where a vigorous night was enjoyed. Only toward dawn did it register that the basis of their amour was commercial. While Lucrecia slept he had gone out a window, fallen down a mountainside, and crawled torn and battered to a highway.

He rummaged in the money drawer. Enough was here for everybody. He sought, in the garage, a less conspicuous conveyance. He settled on a smaller machine—a Reno-Simpson 4-4-2 Demi-Hydro (Modified)—and sped briskly down the road.

He hummed a jaunty tune. Could one, he debated, under the carefree statutes of the Bahamas, locate and divorce (by long distance) someone named Mary Smith (no middle initial, no address) without it infringing on the sanctity of one's present marriage? Something like removing one's long underwear while wearing a frogman's suit, he thought. But this was an age of impossibles. Just tonight he would substitute entertainingly for a man he had never seen. Downhill he hurtled toward complication number four.

The voice was satin-suave but imperious, the words were spaced and given emphasis like breechblocks on an assembly line. "*You maid take sheets off bed in my room,*" declaimed Hubert W. Poundstone to the dapper desk clerk in the lobby of the De Oro. "I not want

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sheets changed. Sheets mine," pointing to himself. "U.S. Sheets. *Estados Unidos* sheets, *sabe,* Pedro?"

"Yes, certainly," said the clerk, but had then to pick up the buzzing telephone. His name was not Pedro. Abiding the interruption, Poundstone, a tall porpoise-shaped man with smooth pink cheeks, let his hooded eyes drift lazily and arrogantly over the lobby and its potted plants and human baggage. He saw nothing worth the oiled turn of his head. He wore an ascot and a blue blazer with brass buttons and smelled of high-priced cologne.

Farrow, who had quickly recognized him from the bureau portrait, drew closer and leafed through travel brochures. Poundstone's was a familiar attack. He toured countries like a farm tractor through a garden. Americano, spoken slowly and loudly enough should be understandable anywhere in the universe. Or to people of any intelligence.

"I bring own sheets when I make travel," he persisted. "Sheets mine personally. You maid put my *Estados Unidos* sheets in you laundry. I want back."

"Yes, I understand perfectly, Mr. Poundstone. Our most sincere apologies. I'll give instructions for—"

"Bonos," Poundstone acknowledged, and glided to an open elevator. Farrow stepped in behind him. He stepped out after Poundstone on the second floor. He dawdled to inspect a so-so wall painting while Poundstone strode away to unlock a door on a balcony overlooking the patio swimming pool and the Pacific. Farrow waited for the door to close and went to look at the number. Number 16.

He followed the balcony back and around its U to Number 28 where Lucrecia did business. Her window faced, across the patio, the closed door which Poundstone, back from Hong Kong—did what and why?

His conversation with Lucrecia, a not uncomely dark-eyed lady, was in Spanish. Reproduction in that tongue would be ostentatious. Bygones were bygones, she smiled glitteringly, counting the money. Would Farrow, perhaps (she was not *occupado* now), did he . . .?

Not today, Farrow said politely. But for another category of service he was ready to settle on her an additional 2000 pesos cash.

She was puzzled. Then quickly she beamed and nodded agreement. Boots and whips?

No, no, Farrow explained. If she could, between now and mid-evening, defer all engage-

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ments and keep a sharp eye on the comings and goings of the señor in Room 16 across the patio, noting, for example, what visitors came and went . . .?

In a warm bath in a blue sunken tub he prepared for Pamela's father. He dried himself and searched for the yellow silk robe, but could not find it. He was humming as he poured a glass of wine. The telephone rang. It was Pamela.

"Dolling, where *have* you been? Didn't Pilar tell you I've been calling?"

"Didn't see Pilar." He dilated his nostrils to an unpleasant odor. "She seems to be downstairs cooking something unorthodox. I've been out for a drive."

"But you know one of us has to be there when father calls. Hasn't he?"

"Not if Pilar didn't tell you."

"Double-damn. *Bad* father. Well, then listen. I've almost got Cecil cornered, the drunken sod. He's been bar-hopping down the coast. He left the place I'm in not five minutes ago."

"Where is that?"

"*Miles* from you. Toward Acapulco. And he's said to be acting very badly, so I'll have to catch him and bribe him with half the moon. I wouldn't doubt father might be en route in a rent-a-car, and I'll try to be there in a jiffy, but meanwhile you be on hand, and don't forget you're Poundstone."

"From where? Where did he grow up and go to school?"

"Just make something up, it doesn't matter."

"De acuerdo," answered Farrow from the text.

He was enjoying his wine; then he wasn't. He vaulted from his lounge chair. The affront to his nostrils was not Pilar's cooking. No, he knew the sour odor. He hurried down the hall and opened doors—a bedroom, a linen closet, a study-library, then a bedroom on whose bed rested Griggs's battered suitcase. Clothes were strewn about. On the floor, moist and crusted, like objects fallen off an Art League collage, were two discarded socks.

Heavily he sat down. He rose. He continued the length of the hall and stared down at the swimming pool. The yellow robe lay over the back of a lawn chair. Beside it, on another, flabby and maggot-white, reclined Griggs with a drink in his hand. The robe meant he had been foraging about in their bedroom. And where else? Had he pocketed the Nassau air tickets? Farrow had not seen them on the bedside table.

He retraced his steps, closing

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the doors he had thrown open. In the study the red telephone on the desk made him think of Lucrecia. He stepped inside, closed the door, and, in the swivel chair, massaged his face while he pondered Griggs, the telephone, and the desk's scattered papers. He picked up the telephone, then put it down. He looked for a telephone book. There was unopened mail addressed to Sykes-Coddington, postmarked days and weeks ago but never forwarded. Complex legal letters choked a basket; reports of fund dividends, charity solicitations. He pulled open one drawer, then a second. He skimmed a typewritten letter and frowned. He read it through from the start. He read others, then opened other drawers.

He swiveled the leather desk chair and stared at the Pacific. He looked in the phone book and called Lucrecia who, as it happened, had some news. He thanked her, replaced the phone, and looked in the book for a second number. This was an alcoholic retiree who drank in the Ecija barrooms and inhabited the American colony. Farrow asked him if he knew a minister named Ricketts.

By the pool he had a highball and talked to Griggs.

"Oh, yes, by way of curiosity, the money I gave you this morning, did you share-and-share-alike with Dewey and Sprague according to our motto?"

"Didn't even have any for myself," Griggs confessed. "You know that little dark arcade near where the cathedral is? Four guys jumped me and took everything I had."

"Jumped you in broad daylight outside the church?" Farrow whistled softly.

"Gone before I could get up off the ground."

"Knocked you down, did they?"

Griggs stretched his arms and arched his head back. "Anyway, I didn't even have the rent money, so I figured I could stay up here until I get organized."

"Did you bring my stuff too?"

"No, I was going to but it wouldn't fit in the cab."

"Little tiny cab, eh? Taxicab twelve miles up here? I thought they cleaned you out."

"They did," Griggs said, "but I was buddies with this particular cab driver. I'd done him a favor and he drove me up free."

"What kind of favor did you do the taxi driver, Griggs?"

"It's been a long time. I don't remember exactly."

"Good man. That's the true kind of Christianity. You don't keep score. Maybe you saved

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him from drowning in the Pacific or took care of his hospital bills or told his family you'd take them all to the States."

Griggs turned his head in a grin. "Be as smart as you want to, old buddy," he cautioned. "Just so you remember where we stand."

"Oh, I remember, all right."

"I don't even know Pamela—yet—but I've as much claim to what's here as you have. At least I'm eligible."

"Eligible? Why, you're the John Gilbert of the western tropics. I just wish, since you don't know her, you'd quit calling her by her first name. Somehow it degrades her. And the only reason I'm grilling you, I was worried about my luggage and that wedding certificate lying around."

"It's safe, old sport. It's with a friend of mine somewhere, all enveloped and stamped and addressed to the right people in case anything should happen to me."

Farrow glanced at his watch. "Just don't let it disarrange your judgment, piggy. One dumb remark at that supper table tonight with her father sitting there and he'll—from what I hear of him—boot you off that cliff ahead of me."

"A little suspense never hurt anybody," Griggs grinned. "You know what I've just about decided? Using one of these fancy cars of hers, I could live up here and have breakfast in the morning before spinning down for classes at the *Alianza*."

"Sounds terrific, Griggs, but the house belongs to her father and he'll be coming in very soon. He's meticulous about some things. Right now I'd suggest you get up there and take a bath and shave. You smell bad. Brush your teeth. And find some clothes that don't smell."

"Was thinking of doing that." Griggs stood and put on the yellow robe.

"You'll find your luggage in the big room down the hall. You'd thrown it in the room her father uses."

"I thought that big room was Pamela's."

"It was before she married me. We're in a bigger one at this end of the hall. To narrow your souvenir hunting, I locked the door."

He watched Griggs's departure. He finished his drink. Dusk was coming. He took a slow stroll on the grounds, passing the six-car garage and lingering along the balustrade above the waves pounding and sucking at the rocks. Beyond the yacht the orange rim of the sun disappeared. Time for dressing in the bedroom with Pamela preparatory to a splendid dinner. Time, nearly, for daddy.

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and the Hubert Poundstone act.

In the upstairs bedroom —their bedroom—he saw the lights go on. Griggs, in the yellow bathrobe, prowled about. A bit of looting, perhaps; anything he might have overlooked before he knew the room was Farrow's.

Farrow took a bench facing the ocean. It grew dark. What a pretty little dream. Ricketts was no minister; he was a disbarred lawyer from Chicago who had fled south from his creditors and did odd jobs along this coast. Some odd job.

Pamela? Ah, yes, Pamela. Well, Pamela, not a quarter hour after his own departure from the De Oro (and a half hour before she telephone him) had rapped on the door of Room 16 and departed *allegro con hot sauce* with the real Hubert W. Poundstone and his U.S. sheets and luggage.

Farrow threw a handful of gravel over the low wall at the sea. He thought he heard something, but did not. Then he saw the dim sweeping halos of two headlights making the road turns, coming up. He watched them grow brighter and now flicker in the vegetation. The engine came moaning and the car appeared and circled to stop at the wide front door. The headlights went off and the driver dismounted and went inside. Hard to make out that figure, but he knew who it wasn't. For eleven years, according to the correspondence upstairs, Pamela's father had been confined to a New York sanitarium. Farrow lifted his eyes to the lighted upstairs window.

Here is how that went. A figure in yellow was in the room. A second figure, dressed darkly, came into the light. There were three pistol shots. There was no one in yellow.

Farrow left the bench and crossed damp grass and caliche to the front screen door. He punched the chime and pushed open the screen as Sykes-Coddington walked leisurely down the stairs. "Did I hear shots?" Farrow asked.

"Yes, three," Sykes-Coddington said cheerily. He strained in the darkness to see his questioner. "Ah, Farrow. Good fellow. Just in time for a drink." He led the way into an adjoining room with a bar. "Know a chap named Griggs by any chance? Afraid I just killed him by mistake. Thought he was someone named Poundstone before I checked his I.D. Soda? No loss, I wouldn't guess—Griggs. Bloody sneak. Ruined my favorite silk bathrobe. Stealing money out of the bureau drawers—money scattered everywhere. Where on

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earth does Pam get these people?"

He handed Farrow a drink as the phone rang.

"Ah, yes, Pamela," he said into the phone. "Cecil here . . . At the airport, are you? . . . I *know* you are, dear, I hear the bloody planes . . . Won't tell me where you're going? Well, I'll find out and be along . . . Me? Nothing much. Just sitting here enjoying a drink with a very pleasant young chap named Farrow.

"Hello? Hello, Pamela . . ." He listened hard at the phone, looked at it, shook it in his hand, smiled, and put it down. "Not very complimentary. I mentioned your name and she hung up."

"I'm supposed to be dead, that's why. She recruited me to stand in for Poundstone to impress her father."

"Her *father?* Man's an invalid, bedridden. Couldn't walk three feet. Why on earth should she want *you* dead? What have you done to poor Pamela?"

"I think the idea was to get you jailed for murdering me, wasn't it?"

"Yes, she keeps trying to do that kind of thing. Harebrained, muddling female. Do my best to keep her off balance. Led her London detectives to believe I'd fly in at eight tonight. Gave them the slip and came early, as Fishwick. Thought sure I'd surprise them. Too bad. She's gone again. Well. Another time."

"You won't give her a divorce? Is that it?"

"Not for Poundstone. Bloody fortune-hunting swine. Never have laid eyes on the man, that's the problem. No photographs extant except one she's said to carry around. I don't mind. Gives added zest. You see, Pam, on film location in the Orient, had a mad fling with him and, back home, passed him off as her half brother adrift in the East needing something to do. I put him, by mail, in our Hong Kong office. Not only embezzled me blind but cheated my best customers. Gave my whole name and operation such a black eye it's cost me a couple of million. I'm not poor. I'm interested in what oafish clog-dance she led you."

Farrow told him everything. The "cleric" Ricketts, Griggs, Lucrecia, and Poundstone were included. The Englishman laughed outrageously, slapping his leg, spilling part of his drink. "Had a go at her, did you? Don't look sheepish. Everyone does. And so you found out about Ricketts, and how your marriage was bogus, and her father wasn't coming, and she'd bolted with Poundstone, and so you offered up

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Griggs as a substitute Poundstone."

He laughed again. He poured fresh drinks. "Shouldn't laugh, should I? Grubby business for you. Apologize. Yes, I see their scheme now. Through her gumshoes she ascertains I'm due in, hunting for Poundstone. She picks you up and rigs the fake marriage, grooms you as Hubert's surrogate. I arrive, you mistake me for her father, say, 'Good evening, I'm Poundstone,' and I blast you through the middle and go to jail forever. Whereupon Hubert moves in up here. Too complex for Pam to have thought up. I suspect Poundstone hatched it from the shadows."

"Except Griggs got me mad enough to go into that bar where I happened to meet you. I told her about talking to you, so she could hardly go on presuming you'd mistake me for Poundstone. She eloped with the airplane tickets but must have stopped somewhere en route to collect him. I beat her to the De Oro and discovered him."

"But she still nourished the possibility I just might show up in the gloom and shoot the first chap I saw," the other said. "That I did. Fatuous Poundstone. Doesn't he realize I could have him in prison for embezzlement even if I were in jail?"

"Why haven't you?"

"I'm a sporting man," Sykes-Coddington said. "So what's for you now, Farrow? Back to bedbug, book, and candle?"

Farrow gestured limply. "What else?"

"No, I think you ought to be better compensated for your troubles. But for our accidental meeting it could be you on that floor upstairs instead of your sneak thief, Griggs. Let me think. I've never seen Poundstone. You have. Might have a job for you if you're interested. And I'd pay well."

Where the Buunjak feeds its crocodiles to the Niastomiz; where the giant nasturtiums and orange trumpet flowers strive among the lilishwa bushes beneath the creeper-choked branches of the cedar and wattle and gibbet tree; where night excites the lion's roar and cry of hyrax and hyena, the bark of African cricket and scream of parrot, the chatter of the colobus monkey, shrill of spurfowl, croak of frog, and ting-tang of the bell bird—where these sights, sounds, rot odors, and cloudbursts interlace, Farrow, in the bar of the New Day Hotel, had a drink. The drink was pink gin.

Rain pounded the iron roof and gurgled on the sodden

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ground outside. He listened and his right eyebrow twitched. He sought to make sense of the past year's disorder: there were planes and ships and dugouts on the Amazon; mosquito netting and customs sheds and snowmobiles across Greenland; skin rashes, quinine pills, berserk elephants, Land Rovers bogged down in malarious swamps, and six thousand games of gin rummy. What had he started out to do?

The door opened and Sykes-Coddington bent in from the downpour. He shook out his drenched mackintosh and stamped his gumboots on the bare wood floor. He had been off at a telephone somewhere. "*Uwee! Uwee!* Ever hear that? Kikuyu war cry." He joined Farrow and signaled the native barman.

"Onto something," he said. "Couple passed through Kimogu on the run. Man fits Poundstone's description. Pamela they were certain of. For the last fourteen months, twice a night, her first film has been the only one available to their cinema. Whole town's seen it eight-hundred-and-fifty-odd times. *Lizard Man Meets the Purple Fungus.* Love it. Love Pamela. Swarmed around her, cooked up some *posho* and caterpillar; drums and dances. She chartered an aircraft near there. Connecting flight north out of Ubendi. Ever seen Sweden?"

Farrow's eye twitched. He never had.

"That's where they're headed. We'll catch up with them in Stockholm."

"We never seem to get any closer," Farrow said.

"Thought you knew by now, old boy," the Englishman said. "Don't think I really want to catch them until they're ready for it. Killed that one blighter—Griggs. One's enough. No, I've decided to just walk them down."

"Walk them down?"

Cecil Sykes-Coddington lifted his gin. "Always amazes me how little Americans know about their own country. Never heard of how they used to catch the wild mustang? Nuisance animals, really, not good for much. Led good horses astray. Not very intelligent. Stuck to their own small preserve of twenty or thirty square miles, wouldn't leave it. So relays of horsemen simply followed them in circles at a steady, unending walk, walking twenty-four hours a day, giving the poor beasts no rest until they pulled up from sheer exhaustion. Then it was easy."

"Walking Hubert down," Farrow said. "Are we getting a relay?"

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"Don't need any. We have trains and planes and telephones and ample money. Imagine Pam and Poundstone dashing through airports, creeping down alleys, hiding in doorways, slipping incognito into backstreet hotels like your Espléndido, and never getting a decent night's sleep without snapping awake a dozen times a night to what they think is my footstep in the hall. Drive them wacky."

"So," proposed Farrow. "We walk them down, we exhaust them. They're sick, underweight, dirty, half-deranged, and by then they hate each other's guts. What then?"

"Ah, what then?" Cecil Sykes-Coddington smiled.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDBOUNDS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Constantine, K. C.	THE BLANK PAGE	Saturday Review Press	$5.95	11/6
Gilbert, Michael	FLASH POINT (A Harper Novel of Law and Lawlessness)	Harper & Row	6.95	11/27

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a MISS MARPLE detective story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

One of the best short stories about Miss Marple . . . in which Jane Marple, the "gentle, fussy-looking, elderly spinster" reveals the true secret of her detective method: "It's just that living in a village as I do, one gets to know so much about human nature." And here she applies her method to the finding of a "buried treasure." But Miss Marple warns you: "There's such a thing as a secret inside a secret" . . .

STRANGE JEST

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"And this," said Jane Helier, completing her introductions, "is Miss Marple!"

Being an actress, she was able to make her point. It was clearly the climax, the finale. Her tone was equally compounded of reverent awe and triumph.

The odd part of it was that the object thus proudly proclaimed was merely a gentle, fussy-looking, elderly spinster. In the eyes of the two young people who had just, by Jane's good offices, made her acquaintance, there showed incredulity and a tinge of dismay. They were nice-looking people—the girl, Charmian Stroud, slim and dark; the man, Edward Rossiter, a fair-haired, amiable young giant.

Charmian said, a little breathlessly, "Oh, we're awfully pleased to meet you." But there was doubt in her eyes. She flung a quick questioning glance at Jane Helier.

"Darling," said Jane, answering the glance, "she's absolutely *marvelous*. Leave it all to her. I told you I'd get her here and I have." She added to Miss Marple, "*You'll* fix it for them, I know. It will be easy for *you*."

Miss Marple turned her placid, china-blue eyes toward Mr. Rossiter. "Won't you tell me what all this is about?"

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"Jane's a friend of ours," Charmian broke in impatiently. "Edward and I are in rather a fix. Jane said if we would come to her party, she'd introduce us to someone who was—who could—"

Edward came to the rescue. "Jane tells us you're the last word in sleuths, Miss Marple."

The old lady's eyes twinkled, but she protested modestly. "Oh, no, no! Nothing of the kind. It's just that living in a village as I do, one gets to know so much about human nature. But really you have made me quite curious. Do tell me your problem."

"I'm afraid it's terribly hackneyed—just buried treasure," said Edward.

"Indeed? But that sounds most exciting!"

"I know. Like Treasure Island. But our problem lacks the usual romantic touches. No point on a chart indicated by a skull and crossbones, no directions like 'four paces to the left, west by north.' It's horribly prosaic—just where we ought to dig."

"Have you tried at all?"

"I should say we'd dug about two solid square acres! The whole place is ready to be turned into a market garden. We're just discussing whether to grow vegetable marrows or potatoes."

Charmian said, rather abruptly, "May we really tell you all about it?"

"But, of course, my dear."

"Then let's find a peaceful spot. Come on, Edward." She led the way out of the overcrowded and smokeladen room, and they went up the stairs, to a small sitting room on the second floor.

When they were seated, Charmian began, "Well, here goes. The story starts with Uncle Mathew, uncle—or rather, great great uncle—to both of us. He was incredibly ancient. Edward and I were his only relations. He was fond of us and always declared that when he died he would leave his money between us. Well, he died last March and left everything he had to be divided equally between Edward and myself. What I've just said sounds rather callous—I don't mean that it was right that he died—actually we were very fond of him. But he'd been ill for some time.

"The point is that the 'everything' he left turned out to be practically nothing at all. And that, frankly, was a bit of a blow to us both, wasn't it, Edward?"

The amiable Edward agreed. "You see," he said, "we'd counted on it. I mean, when you know a good bit of money

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is coming to you, you don't—well—buckle down and try to make it yourself. I'm in the Army—not got anything to speak of outside my pay—and Charmian herself hasn't a bean. She works as a stage manager in a repertory theater—quite interesting and she enjoys it, but no money in it. We'd counted on getting married, but weren't worried about the money side of it because we both knew we'd be jolly well off some day."

"And now, you see, we're not," said Charmian. "What's more, Ansteys—that's the family place, and Edward and I both love it—will probably have to be sold. And Edward and I feel we just can't bear that! But if we don't find Uncle Mathew's money we shall *have* to sell."

Edward said, "You know, Charmian, we still haven't come to the vital point."

"Well, you talk then."

Edward turned to Miss Marple. "It's like this, you see. As Uncle Mathew grew older he got more and more suspicious. He didn't trust anybody."

"Very wise of him," said Miss Marple. "The depravity of human nature is unbelievable."

"Well, you may be right. Anyway, Uncle Mathew thought so. He had a friend who lost his money in a bank, and another friend who was ruined by an absconding solicitor, and he lost some money himself in a fraudulent company. He got so that he used to hold forth at great length that the only safe and sane thing to do was to convert your money into solid bullion and bury it."

"Ah," said Miss Marple. "I begin to see."

"Yes. Friends argued with him, pointed out that he'd get no interest that way, but he held that that didn't really matter. The bulk of your money, he said, should be 'kept in a box under the bed or buried in the garden.' Those were his words."

Charmian went on, "And when he died he left hardly anything at all in securities, though he was very rich. So we think that that's what he must have done."

Edward explained. "We found that he had sold securities and drawn out large sums of money from time to time, and nobody knows what he did with the money. But it seems probable that he lived up to his principles and did buy gold and bury it."

"He didn't say anything before he died? Leave any paper? No letter?"

"That's the maddening part of it. He didn't. He'd been unconscious for some days, but he rallied before he died. He

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looked at us both and chuckled—a faint, weak little chuckle. He said, 'You'll be all right, my pretty pair of doves.' And then he tapped his eye—his right eye—and winked at us. And then—he died . . . Poor old Uncle Mathew."

"He tapped his eye," said Miss Marple thoughtfully.

Edward said eagerly, "Does that convey anything to you? It made me think of an Arsène Lupin story where there was something hidden in a man's glass eye. But Uncle Mathew didn't have a glass eye."

Miss Marple shook her head. "No, I can't think of anything at the moment."

Charmian said disappointedly, "Jane told us you'd say *at once* where to dig!"

Miss Marple smiled. "I'm not quite a conjurer, you know. I didn't know your uncle, or what sort of man he was, and I don't know the house or the grounds."

Charmian said, "If you did know them?"

"Well, it must be quite simple really, mustn't it?" said Miss Marple.

"Simple!" said Charmian. "You come down to Ansteys and see if it's simple!"

It is possible that she did not mean the invitation to be taken seriously, but Miss Marple said briskly, "Well, really, my dear, that's very kind of you. I've always wanted to have the chance of looking for buried treasure. And," she added, looking at them with a beaming, late-Victorian smile, "with a love interest too!"

"You see!" said Charmian, gesturing dramatically.

They had just completed a grand tour of Ansteys. They had been round the heavily trenched kitchen garden. They had been through the little woods, where every important tree had been dug round, and had gazed sadly on the pitted surface of the once smooth lawn. They had been up to the attic, where old trunks and chests had been rifled of their contents. They had been down to the cellars, where flagstones had been heaved from their sockets. They had measured and tapped walls, and Miss Marple had been shown every antique piece of furniture that contained or could be suspected of containing a secret drawer.

On a table in the morning room there was a heap of papers—all the papers that the late Mathew Stroud had left. Not one had been destroyed, and Charmian and Edward came back to them again and again, earnestly perusing bills, invitations, and business correspondence in the hope of spot-

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ting a hitherto unnoticed clue.

"Can you think of anywhere we haven't looked?" demanded Charmian hopefully.

Miss Marple shook her head. "You seem to have been very thorough, my dear. Perhaps, if I may say so, just a little *too* thorough. I always think, you know, that one should have a plan. It's like my friend, Mrs. Eldritch; she had such a nice little maid, polished linoleum beautifully, but she was so thorough that she polished the bathroom floors too much, and as Mrs. Eldritch was stepping out of the bath the mat slipped from under her and she had a very nasty fall and actually broke her leg! Most awkward, because the bathroom door was locked, of course, and the gardener had to get a ladder and come in through the window —terribly distressing to Mrs. Eldritch, who had always been a very modest woman."

Edward moved restlessly.

Miss Marple said quickly, "Please forgive me. So apt, I know, to fly off at a tangent. But one thing does remind one of another. And sometimes that is helpful. All I was trying to say was that perhaps if we tried to sharpen our wits and think of a *likely* place—"

Edward said crossly, "You think of one, Miss Marple. Charmian's brains and mine are now only beautiful blanks."

"Dear, dear. Of course—most tiring for you. If you don't mind I'll just look through all this." She indicated the papers on the table. "That is, if there's nothing private—I don't want to appear to pry."

"Oh, that's all right. But I'm afraid you won't find anything."

She sat down by the table and methodically worked through the sheaf of documents. As she replaced each one, she sorted them automatically into tidy little heaps. When she had finished she sat staring in front of her for some minutes.

Edward asked, not without a touch of malice, "Well, Miss Marple?"

Miss Marple came to herself with a little start. "I beg your pardon. Most helpful."

"You've found something relevant?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that, but I do believe I know what sort of man your Uncle Mathew was. Rather like my own Uncle Henry, I think. Fond of rather obvious jokes. A bachelor, evidently—I wonder why —perhaps an early disappointment? Methodical up to a point, but not very fond of being tied up—so few bachelors are!"

Behind Miss Marple's back Charmian made a sign to Edward. It said, "She's ga-ga."

Miss Marple was continuing

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happily to talk of her deceased Uncle Henry. "Very fond of puns, he was. And to some people, puns are most annoying. A mere play upon words may be very irritating. He was a suspicious man too. Always was convinced the servants were robbing him. And sometimes, of course, they were, but not always. It grew upon him, poor man. Toward the end he suspected them of tampering with his food, and finally refused to eat anything but boiled eggs! Said nobody could tamper with the inside of a boiled egg. Dear Uncle Henry, he used to be such a merry soul at one time—very fond of his coffee after dinner. He always used to say, 'This coffee is very Moorish,' meaning, you know, that he'd like a little more."

Edward felt that if he heard any more about Uncle Henry he'd go mad.

"Fond of young people too," Miss Marple went on, "but inclined to tease them a little, if you know what I mean. Used to put bags of sweets where a child just couldn't reach them."

Casting politeness aside, Charmian said, "I think he sounds horrible!"

"Oh, no dear, just an old bachelor, you know, and not used to children. And he wasn't at all stupid, really. He used to keep a good deal of money in the house and he had a safe put in. Made a great fuss about it—how very secure it was. As a result of his talking so much, burglars broke in one night and actually cut a hole in the safe with a chemical device."

"Served him right," said Edward.

"Oh, but there was nothing in the safe," said Miss Marple. "You see, he really kept the money somewhere else—behind some volumes of sermons in the library, as a matter of fact. He said people never took a book of that kind out of the shelf."

Edward interrupted excitedly, "I say, that's an idea. What about the library?"

But Charmian shook a scornful head. "Do you think I hadn't thought of that? I went through all the books Tuesday, when you went off to Portsmouth. Took them all out, shook them. Nothing there."

Edward sighed. Then, rousing himself, he endeavored to rid himself tactfully of their disappointing guest. "It's been awfully good of you to come down as you have and try to help us. Sorry it's been all a washout. Feel we trespassed a lot on your time. However, I'll get the car out and you'll be able to catch the three thirty—"

"Oh," said Miss Marple, "but we've got to find the money, haven't we? You mustn't give

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up, Mr. Rossiter. 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again.'"

"You mean you're going to go on trying?"

"Strictly speaking," said Miss Marple. "I haven't begun yet. 'First catch your hare—' as Mrs. Beeton says in her cookery book—a wonderful book but terribly expensive; most of the recipes begin 'take a quart of cream and a dozen eggs.' Let me see, where was I? Oh, yes. Well, we have, so to speak, caught our hare—the hare being, of course, your Uncle Mathew, and we've only got to decide now where he would have hidden the money. It ought to be quite simple."

"Simple?" demanded Charmian.

"Oh, yes, dear. I'm sure he would have done the obvious thing. A secret drawer—that's my solution."

Edward said dryly, "You couldn't put bars of gold in a secret drawer."

"No, no, of course not. But there's no reason to believe the money is in gold."

"He always used to say—"

"So did my Uncle Henry about his safe! So I should strongly suspect that that was just a simple blind. Diamonds, now they could be in a secret drawer quite easily."

"But we've looked in all the secret drawers. We had a cabinetmaker over to examine the furniture."

"Did you, dear? That was clever of you. I should suggest your uncle's own desk would be the most likely. Was it the tall *escritoire* against the wall there?"

"Yes. And I'll show you." Charmian went over to it. She took down the flap. Inside were pigeonholes and little drawers. She opened a small door in the center and touched a spring inside the left-hand drawer. The bottom of the center recess clicked and slid forward. Charmian drew it out revealing a shallow well beneath. It was empty.

"Now isn't that a coincidence," exclaimed Miss Marple. "Uncle Henry had a desk just like this, only his was burr walnut and this is mahogany."

"At any rate," said Charmian, "there's nothing there, as you can see."

"I expect," said Miss Marple, "your cabinetmaker was a young man. He didn't know everything. People were very artful when they made hiding places in those days. There's such a thing as a secret inside a secret."

She extracted a hairpin from her neat bun of gray hair. Straightening it out, she stuck the point into what appeared to

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be a tiny wormhole in one side of the secret recess. With a little difficulty she pulled out a small drawer. In it was a bundle of faded letters and a folded paper.

Edward and Charmian pounced on the find together. With trembling fingers Edward unfolded the paper. He dropped it with an exclamation of disgust.

"A damned cookery recipe. Baked ham!"

Charmian was untying a ribbon that held the letters together. She drew one out and glanced at it. "Love letters!"

Miss Marple reacted with Victorian gusto. "How interesting! Perhaps the reason your uncle never married."

Charmian read aloud, "'My ever dear Mathew, I must confess that the time seems long indeed since I received your last letter. I try to occupy myself with the various tasks allotted to me and often say to myself that I am indeed fortunate to see so much of the globe, though little did I think when I went to America that I should voyage off to these far islands!' "

Charmian broke off. "Where is it from? Oh, Hawaii!" She went on: " 'Alas, these natives are still far from seeing the light. They are in an unclothed and savage state and spend most of their time swimming and dancing, adorning themselves with garlands of flowers. Mr. Gray has made some converts but it is up-hill work and he and Mrs. Gray get sadly discouraged. I try to do all I can to cheer and encourage him, but I, too, am often sad for a reason you can guess, dear Mathew. Alas, absence is a severe trial to a loving heart. Your renewed vows and protestations of affection cheered me greatly. Now and always you have my faithful and devoted heart, dear Mathew, and I remain—

Your true love,

Betty Martin

" 'P.S.: I address my letter under cover to our mutual friend, Matilda Graves, as usual. I hope Heaven will pardon this little subterfuge.' "

Edward whistled. "A female missionary! So that was Uncle Mathew's romance. I wonder why they never married?"

"She seems to have gone all over the world," said Charmian, looking through the letters. "Mauritius—all sorts of places. Probably died of yellow fever or something."

A gentle chuckle made them start. Miss Marple was apparently much amused. "Well, well," she said. "Fancy that, now!"

She was reading the recipe for baked ham. Seeing their in-

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quiring glances, she read out, "'Baked Ham with Spinach. Take a nice piece of gammon, stuff with cloves and cover with brown sugar. Bake in a slow oven. Serve with a border of puréed spinach.' What do you think of that now?"

"I think it sounds filthy," said Edward.

"No, no, actually it would be very good—but what do you think of *the whole thing?*"

A sudden ray of light illuminated Edward's face. "Do you think it's a code—cryptogram of some kind?" He seized it. "Look here, Charmian, it might be, you know! No reason to put a cooking recipe in a secret drawer otherwise."

"Exactly," said Miss Marple. "Very, very significant."

Charmian said, "I know what it might be—invisible ink! Let's heat it. Turn on the electric fire."

Edward did so. But no signs of writing appeared.

Miss Marple coughed. "I really think, you know, that you're making it rather *too* difficult. The recipe is only an indication. It is, I think, the letters that are significant."

"The letters?"

"Especially," said Miss Marple, "the signature."

But Edward hardly heard her. He called excitedly, "Charmian! Come here! She's right. See—the envelopes are old right enough, but the letters were written much later."

"Exactly," said Miss Marple.

"They're only fake old. I bet anything old Uncle Mat faked them himself—"

"Precisely," said Miss Marple.

"The whole thing's a sell. There never was a female missionary. It must be a code."

"My dear, dear children, there's really no need to make it all so difficult. Your uncle was really a very simple man. He had to have his little joke, that was all."

For the first time they gave her their full attention. "Just exactly what do you mean, Miss Marple?" asked Charmian.

"I mean, dear, that you're actually holding the money in your hand this minute."

Charmian stared down.

"The signature, dear. That gives the whole thing away. The recipe is just an indication. Shorn of all the cloves and brown sugar and the rest of it, what is it *actually?* Why, gammon and spinach to be sure! *Gammon and spinach!* Meaning—nonsense!

"So, it's clear that it's the letters that are important. And then, if you take into consideration what your uncle did just before he died. He tapped his eye, you said. Well, there you are—that gives you the clue."

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Charmian said, "Are we mad, or are you?"

"Surely, my dear, you must have heard the expression meaning that something is not a true picture, or has it quite died out nowadays: *'All my eye and Betty Martin.'*"

Edward gasped, his eyes falling to the letter in his hand.

"Betty Martin—"

"Of course, Mr. Rossiter. As you have just said, there isn't—there wasn't any such person. The letters were written by your uncle and I daresay he got a lot of fun out of writing them. As you say, the writing on the envelopes is much older—in fact, the envelopes couldn't belong to the letters anyway, because the postmark of the one you are holding is 1851."

She paused. She made it very emphatic. "1851. And that explains everything, doesn't it?"

"Not to me," said Edward.

"Well, of course," said Miss Marple, "I daresay it wouldn't to me if it weren't for my great-nephew Lionel. Such a dear little boy and a passionate stamp-collector. Knows all about stamps. It was he who told me about rare and expensive stamps and that a wonderful new find had come up for auction. And I actually remember his mentioning one stamp—an 1851 *blue 2 cent.* It realized something like $25,000, I believe. Fancy! I should imagine that the other stamps are something also rare and expensive. No doubt your uncle bought through dealers and was careful to 'cover his tracks,' as they say in detective stories."

Edward groaned. He buried his face in his hands.

"What's the matter?" demanded Charmian.

"Nothing. It's only the awful thought that, but for Miss Marple, we might have burned these letters in a decent, gentlemanly way!"

"Ah," said Miss Marple, "that's just what these old gentlemen who are fond of their little jokes never realize. My Uncle Henry, I remember, sent a favorite niece a five-pound note for a Christmas present. He put it inside a Christmas card, gummed the card together, and wrote on it: 'Love and best wishes. Afraid this is all I can manage this year.'

"She, poor girl, was annoyed at what she thought was his meanness and threw it all straight into the fire."

Edward's feelings toward Uncle Henry had suffered an abrupt and complete change.

"Miss Marple," he said, "I'm going to get a bottle of champagne. We'll all drink the health of your Uncle Henry."

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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

To Dame Agatha with Love

ACROSS

1 Scotland Yard inspector
5 Social rank
10 Proved, mathematically: Abbr.
13 Seaweed extract
14 Master detective
15 Egypt, recently: Abbr.
16 Roman emperor
17 Lost from the flock
18 Verbal contraction
19 Lodge brother
20 Casual hello
21 Bug the phones: 2 wds.
23 Go berserk: 2 wds.
25 German Elizabeths
26 Hitler's bodyguard: Abbr.
27 Señoras: Abbr.
28 Side of a triangle
29 Related by blood
31 Discover
32 Clues
34 Half
37 Foxlike
38 Sore throat
39 Gun for hire
40 Words like other words: Abbr.
42 Bug-eyed
43 Defendant, at law
44 Economics, in school lingo
46 Tributary of the Scheldt
47 Young girl
48 Your ed.
50 World organization official: Abbr.
52 Social blunders
54 Tommy's wife (see 30 Down)
56 Our current author, initially
57 Baseball's Mel
58 Farm tool
59 Lodging for a soldier
61 Odd or extra, Scottish style
62 Possessive
63 Throbbing
64 June 6, 1944
65 Quiet burglar
66 Migratory birds
67 Psychic powers

DOWN

1 Miss Marple and namesakes
2 How Miss Christie carries on
3 Detective of the heart
4 Not amateur
5 Lettuce
6 Poirot's brain power: 3 wds.
7 Accusers in court
8 TV operas
9 "The Mysterious Affair at —— "
10 Mystical detective
11 Place for a secret listener
12 Go formal
14 Yielded to blackmailer
20 Males

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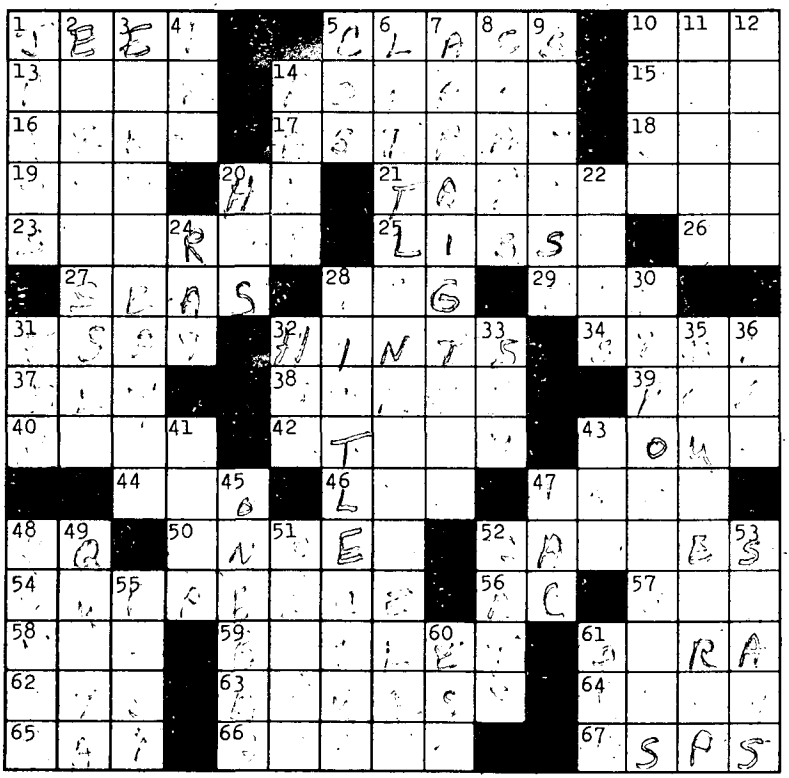
22 The Thames at Oxford
24 A little light
28 No red herring, just a sprat: 2 wds.
30 Detective couple
31 Road curve
32 Former draft system
33 Under-cover man
35 Long-running play, *The* —
36 Identifications, for short
41 Porgy (with bass, not Bess)
43 Luftwaffe battler
45 Single, in baseball: 2 wds.
47 Milk
48 System of morals
49 Proportional amount allowed
51 Sharpshoot from hiding
52 Estate entrance
53 Victorian supports
55 Nuisance
60 Language suffix
61 Poetic form

by Jack Luzzatto **(Solution on page 135)**



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This is the 417th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Not too many debuts in print have taken the form of parody. In our February 1974 issue we "rescued" the long-lost first-published work of A. A. Milne—a burlesque of Sherlock Holmes. And, of course, Robert L. Fish began a distinguished writing career with his first Schlock Homes pundunit. Now we offer you a parody-pastiche of Agatha Christie's Miss Jane Marple, and you will find this first adventure of Miss June Maple delightful spoofing . . .

The author, Michele Spirn, is a freelance who has written copy for public-relations and advertising agencies, and produced and directed public-service films, including an environmental film for high-school students.

Her hobbies are "sculpting, reading mysteries of the Christie school (natch!), running a food co-op, and rearing a 19-month-old son." Her husband is a psychiatric social worker. In the early years of their marriage the Spirns "spent a lot of time traveling in Europe, Turkey, Greece, and Morocco" . . .

MURDER IN THE PANTRY

by MICHELE SPIRN

"Most vexing," murmured Miss Maple. The old lady was dressed to go out in gray tippet, flowered and veiled hat, black gloves, and gold spectacles. In fact, the only item missing was her handbag.

"And that's the point," Miss Maple exclaimed. "Where is my bag?"

"Sherry, Sherry!" she cried. Sherry, the pantrymaid, so named because she liked a little nip now and then, slowly appeared.

"Have you seen my handbag, Sherry?" Both women looked around the comfortable but cluttered room.

"No, mum," replied the loyal

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pantrymaid. "Did you look under the settee? You remember you put it there last time after Colonel Hillary was robbed."

"No, no, it's not there. I moved it behind the mahogany chest after Mrs. Bratherton was murdered," said Miss Maple. "Well, I'll just have to do without it. I'm late collecting for the Jumble Sale. Now, remember, my nephew Sigmund, the famous writer, is dining here tonight. Be sure to set the table with the Georgian silver and don't forget to bring up the port."

"No, mum, I won't forget," said Sherry happily.

Miss June Maple frowned as she left the cottage. Even though Sherry had a heavy hand with the pastry —especially after several libations—Miss Maple kept her on because the pantrymaid was truly devoted to her.

"But she is getting worse," thought Miss Maple. "She fairly staggered in with the joint last night."

Miss Maple walked a little more briskly and was finally soothed by the warmth of the late April sun that was positively beaming down on St. John's Meadow. It was pleasant walking in the little village even though everyone knew it was a hot-bed of crime. Why, just as Miss Maple passed the King's Arms, a pickpocket was busily at work on the coat of Mr. Chillingsworth, the banker. As Mr. Chillingsworth happened to be in the coat, Miss Maple took prompt action.

"Mr. Chillingsworth, watch out for your pocket!" she cried gaily. As she swept on, Miss Maple saw, out of the corner of her eye, that the banker had collared the thief, Tom Tom the butcher's son.

"I must watch out for short weight on the bacon next time," thought the elderly spinster. Thinking of short weight, she glanced into the fishmonger's shop and noticed his thumb planted firmly on the scales along with a good-sized carp. She waggled a finger at him pleasantly and watched him jump.

Miss Maple marched on. A traffic tie-up in front of the Cozy Neste Tea Shoppe caught her eye. Where was Constable Browne? She peered into the shoppe's window. Ah, the constable was having his tea and chatting with Lilah, the waitress.

"I'll fix that," said Miss Maple grimly. She produced a silver whistle from a chain round her neck that her nephew Sigmund, the famous writer, had given her for times of trouble. And blew. Instantly

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Lilah and the constable dashed out of the Cozy Neste. The constable even had a bit of buttered scone still on his chin.

"What's the matter?" huffed the constable, painfully out of breath.

Miss Maple waggled her finger at them meaningfully.

"Really, Miss Maple, you are—" said Lilah, too full of emotion to finish the sentence.

Miss Maple walked on modestly. Indeed, for such an insignificant-looking old lady, Miss Maple was unusually sharp at spotting crime, as the whole village of St. John's Meadow knew. And by no means was her detection limited to petty crimes. Take "The Case of the Trifling Dessert." Or "The Body in the Barn That Wasn't a Cow." Indeed, just the other day Miss Maple had discovered that Charles, the young son of the Grouse-Watersons, was blackmailing Mrs. Emmerton, the village postmistress. Miss Maple had come upon the postmistress paying the tot off in stamps.

Thinking of the Grouse-Watersons, Miss Maple checked the list tucked into her pocket to make sure she had them down for a Jumble Sale contribution. A discreet hint and she was sure they would be glad to donate something.

But first, she thought, she really must visit the Cash-Gladlys. The leading family of the village, the Cash-Gladlys lived in an imposing white house that dwarfed the surrounding cottages quite pleasantly from the point of view of the residents of the house. The household consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Cash-Gladly and their nubile daughter, Celery. They were known for their wealth, education, and virtue.

As Miss Maple opened the gate, she hesitated for a moment, then walked quietly around the side of the house.

"On a day like this Mrs. Cash-Gladly's most likely to be in the garden."

The only person in the garden, however, was Celery Cash-Gladly, a tall blonde girl who was smoothing over some freshly turned earth.

"Oh, Miss Maple," said Celery languidly, "you startled me. I was just planting some rutabaga."

"Were you, my dear? I wish I could plant rutabaga but my garden is so tiny I only have room for the roses."

"Did you ring, Miss Maple? I'm afraid I didn't hear you."

"I thought that was the case. Actually, I'm looking for your mother. I thought she might want to donate something to the vicar's Jumble Sale."

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"Oh, I'm afraid she's gone out."

"Perhaps you could help me?"

"I must go, Miss Maple. I hear the phone and Robin Grey promised to ring me up," said Celery hastily. "Goodbye."

As she watched the girl run up the path, Miss Maple looked stern. "I wonder," she thought, "if it's the case of the baker and Lady Jane or, then again, it could be like that little scheme of Harry Botherby's."

Puzzled, the white-haired spinster turned to go but was hailed by a loud voice crying, "Oh, Miss Maple, could I have a word with you?"

Although the only thing visible was a hand waving a vegetable marrow over the fence, Miss Maple knew that Miss Gridley lived in the cottage adjoining the Cash-Gladlys' manor.

She advanced to meet the hand. Miss Gridley whispered, "Can you come round to the front? I have something to ask you—in private!"

Miss Maple picked her way cautiously around to the front of Miss Gridley's house, all the while feeling the uncomfortable sensation that someone was watching her.

Miss Gridley stood in the doorway. As Miss Maple entered, she saw that something had happened to upset the schoolmistress. Her usually ruddy-complexioned face looked ashen.

"It's so difficult to know what to do," said Miss Gridley wringing her hands. "And I don't really know where to begin."

"Begin at the beginning," said Miss Maple patiently.

"I am in a very peculiar position and I want to ask your —advice. I must confess—"

Before she could continue, a shot blasted nearby.

"Oh, Miss Maple, where did that come from?" cried Miss Gridley.

"From the back, I think," said Miss Maple nervously.

The two ladies ran to the back of the house. Celery Cash-Gladly's head peered over the fence.

"Sorry if I frightened you —just shooting at a crow. Such nuisances, these birds."

The two spinsters retreated into the house. Miss Gridley turned and said, "I'm sorry I bothered you, Miss Maple. I've decided that I must go through with this alone. It's better that way. Too late for advice now."

"I understand, my dear," said Miss Maple, looking her most understanding.

"Do you?" said Miss Gridley and quickly shut the door.

Miss Maple pressed on. "This has been a most peculiar morning and I still haven't collected

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anything for the Jumble Sale."

But by early afternoon Miss Maple had called on the Grouse-Watersons and, after a few gentle hints, had assembled a large vase of doubtful origin, a pale pink fascinator, a beaded handbag, and a family portrait of the Grouse-Watersons' great great uncle. As she staggered to the vicarage, she congratulated herself on her powers of persuasion.

By dint of an incredible balancing act she managed to ring the bell. Mr. Hewes, the vicar, answered the door.

"Miss Maple," he said, looking inquiringly over the vase, "is all this for the Jumble Sale?"

"Yes," mumbled Miss Maple from under the fascinator.

"What a diligent worker. Will you have some tea?"

"No, thank you," said Miss Maple. "But I wonder if I could ask a favor of you. My nephew Sigmund, the famous writer, is dining with me tonight and staying for the weekend. Could I persuade you and your wife to visit about nine? I really feel that Sigmund would like to meet you."

"Why, yes, Miss Maple," said Mr. Hewes, "I believe that could be arranged. I shall see you tonight then."

The vicar valiantly tried to wave as he staggered off with the Jumble Sale goods.

Miss Maple was pleased. Giselle, the vicar's wife, was sure to be a receptive audience for Sigmund's stories, and she and Mr. Hewes could chat quietly about the Unwed Mothers' Subscription List. Shocking that nothing had been done about it yet.

But as Miss Maple entered her small cottage, her pleasure was dimmed. Sherry was shrieking.

"Miss Maple, mum, I've been waiting for you. The Georgian silver has disappeared. What shall I do, mum?"

"Don't shriek so, Sherry," said Miss Maple distractedly. "How can I think of village parallels? You know that every crime in the world has been tried in St. John's Meadow. But this is so difficult—is it the same as the fishmonger's missing pair of scales or is it like the episode of Jenny Bentley and the Turkish towels?"

As Miss Maple pondered, Sherry stood silently by.

"Ah, I think I understand," sighed Miss Maple. "In the meantime, Sherry, use the second best silver. It's in the sideboard."

At table that night Miss Maple rose to the occasion. No one would have suspected that she was grieving for her missing silver, not to mention her

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Madeira lace tablecloth, her demitasse set, and her best crystal decanter. Actually, Miss Maple was setting a rather poor table these days.

But Sigmund hadn't seemed to notice. Chewing on the last bite of a rather heavy tart Sherry had made, he said, "And how is St. John's Meadow?"

"Fine," answered Miss Maple crisply. "Still the same stagnant pool of water as ever."

"I can never believe that vice is alive and doing well in the country."

"As far as that goes," said Miss Maple, "you must know there's more scope for anything of that sort here than in the cities."

"So you've always claimed," said Sigmund. "I may come down here for a bit to get some material for my next book."

"Now, Sigmund," said Miss Maple reproachfully, "you know we've discussed that. It wouldn't do for me to have my neighbors suddenly pop up as characters in your books. What would people say?"

"I don't know," said Sigmund. "But I don't understand what keeps you in this hole instead of a nice clean nursing home with people your own age."

"St. John's Meadow has given me a purpose in life," said Miss Maple firmly. "I have devoted myself to rooting out evil. And with my little cottage to live in and Sherry to look after me, I hope I will be able to carry on for a long time. And now I will leave you to your port, Sigmund dear."

Sigmund sighed as she sailed majestically out of the room. Still kept up the old customs. Leaving the gentlemen with their port and cigars. He might as well try to enjoy it this time although he much preferred a stiff Scotch on the rocks.

While Sigmund presumably enjoyed his interlude, Miss Maple felt she must make a final search for her handbag. Too many things were disappearing. It made one feel as if one hadn't a grip on things.

Miss Maple got down on her hands and knees to peer under the whatnot. Perhaps the bag had been jammed behind it. As she was searching, however, a thought occurred to her.

"If that's the reason," she gasped, straightening up slowly, "then I must rethink everything."

Just then the doorbell rang. Miss Maple opened the door and greeted the vicar and his wife.

"Hello, Mr. Hewes, so nice of you to come this evening. Dear Giselle, how are you? Please come in."

But as Miss Maple was about to close the door, Celery Cash-Gladly came racing up

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the path, hastily pushing a perambulator.

"Why, Celery," Miss Maple began.

"Oh, no, Miss Maple," gasped Celery. "For the Jumble Sale. Mother thought it might be useful."

"That certainly looks useful, doesn't it, Mr. Hewes?" inquired Miss Maple.

The vicar nodded his approval.

"Please come in, dear. Wouldn't you like to meet Sigmund?" the old lady asked.

Celery looked sheepish. "Actually, I have read *A Slap Before Dying* and I thought it was wizard."

Miss Maple settled them in the parlor as Sigmund wandered in. After the introductions Miss Maple said, "I must find my knitting. You know, of course, I'm never without it in the evening. So many babies' bonnets and sweaters to make."

Giselle nodded knowingly. Miss Maple was avoided by every expectant mother in St. John's Meadow precisely because of the scratchy old-fashioned baby clothes she insisted on giving.

Miss Maple came back into the parlor suddenly. Her face was pale.

"Mr. Hewes," she interrupted. "I wonder if you might step into the pantry with me for a moment."

The guests looked at her curiously, but went on talking.

"What's the matter, Miss Maple?" asked Mr. Hewes in a low voice as they left the room.

Miss Maple shuddered. "It's Sherry. She's been stabbed in the chest with one of my knitting needles."

"Is she—?" inquired the vicar delicately.

"Dead," nodded Miss Maple. "And I know who did it."

"Now, Miss Maple, calm yourself. Sit down and have some sherry—er—brandy."

"The problem is," she continued, "I'm not sure why the murder was committed. I must think about the motive."

"Shall I call Inspector Clack in the meantime?"

"Yes, please. How remiss of me."

Miss Maple sat quietly in the pantry until Inspector Clack appeared. Mr. Hewes had told the guests what had happened and when Miss Maple walked back into the parlor, she saw Giselle sniffing quietly into a handkerchief, Celery looking vacantly off into space, and Sigmund staring at the rug.

While the Inspector took statements from them, Miss Maple sat silently. Then, when he finished, she said, "Rutabagas."

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"What, Miss Maple?" asked the Inspector, looking at the old lady as if she had gone ga-ga.

"I know who killed Sherry and I know why," she said.

"Now, Miss Maple, we mustn't get above ourselves, must we, even though you did have those little successes with Tom Tom, the butcher's son, and the Body in the Barn That Wasn't a Cow."

"No, you don't understand. It was the rutabagas that started me thinking. Celery said she was planting them. And I wondered. Because it isn't the right time for rutabagas. Too late. And then there was the missing silver, and my handbag, and the rest of my things. When I thought about it, I had an idea of what had happened."

"You mean Celery Cash-Gladly killed Sherry?" asked the Inspector alertly, ready to make an arrest.

Celery sniffed indignantly.

"Oh, no, no. Did I give that impression? How stupid of me. Of course it wasn't Celery. She was merely planting the silver and the other things," said Miss Maple.

"Then who was it?" asked Giselle.

"Why, Sigmund, of course," said Miss Maple, looking at him fondly.

"Sigmund!" exclaimed the vicar. "But why?"

"Really, Aunt June," said Sigmund sharply.

"Dear Sigmund," said Miss Maple. "I admit I was mystified. Then, slowly, a little glimmering of an idea came to me. You see, I had lost so many things."

"But what does that have to do with Sherry's murder?" asked the Inspector exasperatedly.

"Oh, dear, Inspector, I thought I was making myself clear. You see, as one gets older one does get forgetful. Only fortunately I have such a good memory. But perhaps if someone wanted you to leave a certain place he might hide things from you, mightn't he? Do you understand what I mean?"

"No!" shouted the guests.

"I suppose I shall have to come straight to the point. How blunt people are nowadays. You see, Sigmund has been wanting me to leave St. John's Meadow for quite a while now. He had suggested I enter one of those nursing homes. You know, where people wrap you up in a blanket and put you on the porch for an airing."

"That's true, Auntie June," said Sigmund reproachfully. "But you know why."

"You see, Sigmund is a famous writer of mystery novels. Thrillers I believe they're called. Or whodunits. Although

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why they shouldn't be called whydunits I really don't know. Well, I had solved a few cases in the village and Sigmund wanted to write about them, but I wouldn't give him permission until I left St. John's Meadow. One doesn't want one's neighbors to think one is writing about them. People here wouldn't speak to me if Sigmund suddenly published things like—well, the case of the fishmonger's missing scales. So many St. John's Meadow people involved in that one. And in such unsavory ways."

"Ahem," coughed Mr. Hewes significantly, looking at Giselle.

"Well, anyway," continued Miss Maple, "Sigmund hoped that if I began losing so many things I might think I was getting too old to take care of myself. Therefore, the nursing home. But when I took the losses so calmly and didn't feel at all incompetent, he took desperate measures like so many of these mystery-writing people. Really, I can't make head or tail of some of these murder stories these days. Why, I was reading one the other day—"

"I believe we were discussing Sigmund, Miss Maple." The Inspector looked at her tolerantly.

"Oh, yes," said Miss Maple with a far-off look in her eyes.

"Well, Sigmund is a mystery writer and he simply did what so many of them do. Such untidy work habits. If they are having trouble with a particular character, they kill her off. Sherry was his stumbling block. She was devoted to me. And she was the only person I could get to tidy the house and take care of me."

"If that's so, Aunt June," said Sigmund cunningly, "why didn't you hear me kill Sherry?"

Miss Maple answered promptly. "Because I had my head in the whatnot."

"What?" asked Inspector Clack.

"Not," replied Miss Maple. "The stand over there. Sigmund killed Sherry when she brought in the port. I always leave when Sherry brings in the port. And I was searching for my bag and looking under the whatnot."

"Yes," shouted Sigmund suddenly. "It's true. But what you don't know, Aunt June, is that most of the village begged me to find a way of getting rid of you. People were simply tired of your snooping and prying and finding out their sons or wives or cousins had committed some petty crime or other. The only people who weren't in on it were the vicar and his wife."

Mr. Hewes and Giselle looked hurt.

"Even Miss Gridley was in on

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it," Sigmund laughed maniacally. "But she shut her mouth when you fired off the gun, didn't she, Celery?"

Celery nodded, looking frightened.

"Miss Gridley? I don't believe—" Miss Maple pondered. "Oh, yes, that cousin who was sent to jail. Arsenic poisoning."

"Aunt June, I was worried about you," said Sigmund brokenly.

"I suppose that might be a mitigating factor in his case, mightn't it, Inspector?" Miss Maple asked brightly.

But the Inspector was too busy dragging Sigmund out to his waiting police car to offer a reply.

"And now, good night, dear friends," said Miss Maple. "It has been an exciting night. But I am so tired."

And she yawned delicately. Actually, Miss Maple wanted to think. Perhaps she might go to the nursing home after all. If most of the village was arrested as accessories to the crime, well, what would there be left to detect?

And she remembered that Sigmund was quite well off. Being a rooter-out of evil wasn't very lucrative. What better place to write her mysteries than a nice quiet nursing home?

Now she would just have to think of a pen name. Let's see. A. Agatha, that was a good one. Now for a surname. B? C? Yes, C would be fine.

"Q"

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A chuckling (and in its own way, chilling) cocktail-party story that could easily become a legend in its own time—and a new and unexpected facet of Dame Ngaio's talent . . .

A FOOL ABOUT MONEY

by NGAIO MARSH

"Where money is concerned," Harold Hancock told his audience at the enormous cocktail party, "my poor Hersey—and she won't mind my saying so, will you, darling?—is the original dumbbell. Did I ever tell you about her trip to Dunedin?"

Did he ever tell them? Hersey thought. Wherever two or three were gathered did he ever fail to tell them? The predictable laugh, the lovingly coddled pause, and the punchline led into and delivered like an act of God—did he, for pity's sake, ever tell them!

Away he went, mock-serious, empurpled, expansive, and Hersey put on the comic baby face he expected of her. Poor Hersey, they would say, such a goose about money. It's a shame to laugh.

"It was like this—" Harold began . . .

It had happened twelve years ago when they were first in New Zealand. Harold was occupied with a conference in Christchurch and Hersey was to stay with a friend in Dunedin. He had arranged that she would draw on his firm's Dunedin branch for money and take in her handbag no more than what she needed for the journey. "You know how you are," Harold said.

He arranged for her taxi, made her check that she had her ticket and reservation for the train, and reminded her that if on the journey she wanted cups of tea or synthetic coffee or a cooked lunch, she would have to take to her heels at the appropriate stations and

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vie with the competitive male. At this point her taxi was announced and Harold was summoned to a long-distance call from London.

"You push off," he said. "Don't forget that fiver on the dressing table. You won't need it but you'd better have it. Keep your wits about you. 'Bye, dear."

He was still shouting into the telephone when she left.

She had enjoyed the adventurous feeling of being on her own. Although Harold had said you didn't in New Zealand, she tipped the taxi driver and he carried her suitcase to the train and found her seat, a single one just inside the door of a Pullman car.

A lady was occupying the seat facing hers and next to the window.

She was well-dressed, middle-aged and of a sandy complexion with noticeably light eyes. She had put a snakeskin dressing case on the empty seat beside her.

"It doesn't seem to be taken," she said, smiling at Hersey.

They socialized—tentatively at first and, as the journey progressed, more freely. The lady (in his version Harold always called her Mrs. X) confided that she was going all the way to Dunedin to visit her daughter. Hersey offered reciprocative information. In the world outside, plains and mountains performed a grandiose kind of measure and telegraph wires leaped and looped with frantic precision.

An hour passed. The lady extracted a novel from her dressing case and Hersey, impressed by the handsome appointments and immaculate order, had a good look inside the case.

The conductor came through the car intoning, "Ten minutes for refreshments at Ashburton."

"Shall you join in the onslaught?" asked the lady. "It's a free-for-all."

"Shall you?"

"Well—I might. When I travel with my daughter we take turns. I get the morning coffee and she gets the afternoon. I'm a bit slow on my pins, actually."

She made very free use of the word "actually."

Hersey instantly offered to get their coffee at Ashburton and her companion, after a proper show of diffidence, gaily agreed. They explored their handbags for the correct amount. The train uttered a warning scream and everybody crowded into the corridor as it drew up to the platform.

Hersey left her handbag with the lady (an indiscretion heavily emphasized by Harold) and sprinted to the refreshment

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counter where she was blocked off by a phalanx of men. Train fever was running high by the time she was served and her return trip with brimming cups was hazardous indeed.

The lady was holding both their handbags as if she hadn't stirred an inch.

Between Ashburton and Oamaru, a long stretch, they developed their acquaintanceship further, discovered many tastes in common, and exchanged confidences and names. The lady was called Mrs. Fortescue. Sometimes they dozed. Together, at Oamaru, they joined in an assault on the dining room and together they returned to the carriage where Hersey scuffled in her stuffed handbag for a powder-compact. As usual it was in a muddle.

Suddenly a thought struck her like a blow in the wind and a lump of ice ran down her gullet into her stomach. She made an exhaustive search but there was no doubt about it.

Harold's fiver was gone.

Hersey let the handbag fall in her lap, raised her head, and found that her companion was staring at her with a very curious expression on her face. Hersey had been about to confide her awful intelligence but the lump of ice was exchanged for a coal of fire. She was racked by a terrible suspicion.

"Anything wrong?" asked Mrs. Fortescue in an artificial voice.

Hersey heard herself say, "No. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," she said rather hurriedly. "I thought —perhaps—like me, actually, you have bag trouble."

"I do, rather," Hersey said.

They laughed uncomfortably.

The next hour passed in mounting tension. Both ladies affected to read their novels. Occasionally one of them would look up to find the other one staring at her. Hersey's suspicions increased rampantly.

"Ten minutes for refreshments at Palmerston South," said the conductor, lurching through the car.

Hersey had made up her mind. "Your turn!" she cried brightly.

"Is it? Oh. Yes."

"I think I'll have tea. The coffee was awful."

"So's the tea actually. Always. Do we," Mrs. Fortescue swallowed, "do we really want anything?"

"I do," said Hersey very firmly and opened her handbag. She fished out her purse and took out the correct amount. "And a bun," she said. There was no gainsaying her. "I've got a headache," she lied. "I'll be glad of a cuppa."

When they arrived at Pal-

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merston South, Hersey said, "Shall I?" and reached for Mrs. Fortescue's handbag. But Mrs. Fortescue muttered something about requiring it for change and almost literally bolted. "All that for nothing!" thought Hersey in despair. And then, seeing the elegant dressing case still on the spare seat, she suddenly reached out and opened it.

On top of the neatly arranged contents lay a crumpled five-pound note.

At the beginning of the journey when Mrs. Fortescue had opened the case, there had, positively, been no fiver in it.

Hersey snatched the banknote, stuffed it into her handbag, shut the dressing case, and leaned back, breathing short with her eyes shut.

When Mrs. Fortescue returned she was scarlet in the face and trembling. She looked continuously at her dressing case and seemed to be in two minds whether or not to open it. Hersey died a thousand deaths.

The remainder of the journey was a nightmare. Both ladies pretended to read and to sleep. If ever Hersey had read guilt in a human countenance it was in Mrs. Fortescue's.

"I ought to challenge her," Hersey thought. "But I won't. I'm a moral coward and I've got back my fiver."

The train was already drawing into Dunedin station and Hersey had gathered herself and her belongings when Mrs. Fortescue suddenly opened her dressing case. For a second or two she stared into it. Then she stared at Hersey. She opened and shut her mouth three times. The train jerked to a halt and Hersey fled.

Her friend greeted her warmly. When they were in the car she said, "Oh, before I forget! There's a telegram for you."

It was from Harold.

It said: YOU FORGOT YOUR FIVER, YOU DUMBBELL. LOVE HAROLD.

Harold had delivered the punchline. His listeners had broken into predictable guffaws. He had added the customary coda: "And she didn't know Mrs. X's address, so she couldn't do a thing about it. So of course to this day Mrs. X thinks Hersey pinched her fiver."

Hersey, inwardly seething, had reacted in the sheepish manner Harold expected of her when from somewhere at the back of the group a wailing broke out.

A lady erupted as if from a football scrimmage. She looked wildly about her, spotted Hersey, and made for her.

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"At last, at last!" cried the lady. "After all these years!"

It was Mrs. Fortescue.

"It *was* your fiver!" she gabbled. "It happened at Ashburton when I minded your bag. It was, it was!"

She turned on Harold. "It's all your fault," she amazingly announced. "And mine of course." She returned to Hersey. "I'm dreadfully inquisitive. It's a compulsion. I—I—couldn't resist. I looked at your passport. I looked at everything. And my own handbag was open on my lap. And the train gave one of those recoupling jerks and both our handbags were upset. And I could see you," she chattered breathlessly to Hersey, "coming back with that ghastly coffee.

"So I shoveled things back and there was the fiver on the floor. Well, I had one and I thought it was mine and there wasn't time to put it in my bag, so I slapped it into my dressing case. And then, when I paid my luncheon bill at Oamaru, I found my own fiver in a pocket of my bag."

"Oh, my God!" said Hersey.

"Yes. And I couldn't bring myself to confess. I thought you might leave your bag with me if you went to the loo and I could put it back. But you didn't. And then, at Dunedin, I looked in my dressing case and the fiver was gone. So I thought you knew I knew." She turned on Harold.

"You must have left *two* fivers on the dressing table," she accused.

"Yes!" Hersey shouted. "You did, you did! There were two. You put a second one out to get change."

"Why the hell didn't you say so!" Harold roared.

"I'd forgotten. You know yourself," Hersey said with the glint of victory in her eye, "it's like you always say, darling. I'm such a fool about money."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam: Johnson story by

LILLIAN de la TORRE

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THE LOST HEIR

(as told by James Boswell, London & Kent, 1772-1773)

by LILLIAN de la TORRE

"I implore you, Dr. Johnson, help a grieving mother to find her lost son!"

Thus impulsively spoke Paulette, Lady Claybourne, as she crossed the threshold at Johnson's Court. We saw a delicate small personage, past youth indeed, but slim and erect in the most elegant of costly widow's weeds. Her face was a clear oval, cream tinged with pink, and her large dark eyes looked upon us implor-

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ingly under smooth translucent lids. In Dr. Johnson's plain old-fashioned sitting room, she looked like a white butterfly momentarily hovering over the gnarled bole of an oak tree.

Dr. Sam: Johnson, *detector* of crime and chicane, and friend to the distrest, bowed over the small white hand. Then in his sixty-third year, tall and burly, aukward and uncouth, he yet valued himself upon his complaisance to the ladies. His large but shapely fingers engulfed the dainty digits of our guest as he led her to an armed chair, the while replying:

"'Twere duty, no less. But first, ma'am (seating her), you must tell me how you came to lose the child. Pray attend, Mr. Boswell, I shall value your opinion. Ma'am, I present Mr. Boswell, advocate, of Edinburgh in Scotland, my young friend and favourite companion."

Smiling with pleasure to hear myself thus described, I bowed low. The lady inclined slightly, and began her story:

"My son, Sir Richard Claybourne, is no child. He is in his twenty-seventh year, if—if he is in life. His father, Sir Hubert Claybourne, of Claybourne Hall in Kent, left me inconsolable ten years ago, and our only son, Richard, then sixteen, acceded to the title and estate.

"Well, sir, 'tis a common story. Tho' we had been close before, once he came into his estate, I could not controul him. Claybourne Hall saw him but seldom, for he preferred raking in London, running from the gaming tables to—to places more infamous yet.

"Then, as he approached his majority," the soft voice went on, "Richard fell deeply in love, and proposed to marry. 'Twas against my wishes, for tho' the young lady's fortune was ample, she was brought up in a household where I, alas, have no friends. But being neighbours, Cynthia Wentworth drew Richard home to Kent, and at Claybourne, on a day in spring, they were wedded and bedded.

"Alas the day! That very night, Richard burst into my chamber, where I lay alone waking and fretting. He was dishevelled and wild, and, Damn the bitch, says he (pardon me, gentlemen), she has broken my heart, I shall leave England this night. I'll go for a soldier, and never return while she lives. Nothing I said could disswade him. Take care of Claybourne estate, cried he to me, and was gone."

The low voice faltered, and went on:

"With the help of Mr. Matthew Rollis, my trusted solicitor, I

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kept up the estate. Cynthia Wentworth, mute and grim, went back to her foster folk at Rendle. No word came from Richard; but enquiring of returning soldiers, once or twice I heard a rumor of him in the New World, at New-York, at Jamaica. Since then, nothing. Six years have now passed. I can bear it no longer. I must find my boy."

Dr. Johnson looked grave.

"'Tis long for a voluntary absence. Who is the next heir? Who had an interest to prevent Sir Richard's return?"

"Good lack, Dr. Johnson, you do not think—?"

"I do not think. I ask meerly."

"You alarm me, sir. The next heir is Jeremy Claybourne, a lad now rising twenty. He springs from the Claybournes of Rendle, a family I have long lived at enmity with. His father, my husband's late brother Hector—well, I say nothing of him; he was kind to me while he lived. But his wife was a venomous vixen, and never spared to vilify me. In that house Cynthia was brought up and her mind poisoned against me. On them I blame the whole affair.

"Indeed it is pressure from that quarter that drives me to action. The lawyers will have Richard declared dead, and his cousin Jeremy put in possession. On that day they will turn me out into the world without a friend. He must come home and protect me."

"Then we must find him. You say your son departed on his wedding night. How did he depart?"

"I know not how, sir, but Claybourne estate is on the coast; I have thought he went by sea, perhaps in some smuggler's vessel."

"A course full of peril," commented my friend, who considered that being in a ship was like being in gaol, with the likelihood of being drowned. "Alas, madam, what assures you that he is still in life?"

"A mother's heart! I *know* that, somewhere, he is alive!"

"Then we must appeal to him to shew himself, wherever he may be. Bozzy, your tablets. By your leave, ma'am, we'll address him thus in all the papers (dictating):

SIR RICHARD CLAYBOURNE went from his Friends in the year '66, & left his Mother bereft & his Affairs in disorder. Whosoever makes known his whereabouts shall be amply rewarded, & he himself is implored to return to the Bosom of his grieving Mother.

Claybourne Hall in Kent
April ye 10th, 1772

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"There, madam, let this simple screed be disseminated, especially in the seaports of the New World, where he was last heard of; and my life upon it, if he be alive, Sir Richard will give over his sulks and return to his duties."

"I pray it may be so," murmured my Lady.

Dr. Johnson looked after the crested coach as it left the court, and shook his head.

"Let us all pray, for her sake, it may be so."

Time passed. I returned to Edinburgh, and quite forgot the problem of the missing Sir Richard Claybourne and his whereabouts; until once more, in the spring of 1773, I visited London.

I was sitting comfortably with my learned friend in his house in Johnson's Court, when a billet was handed in. Dr. Johnson put up his well-shaped brows as he read it, and passed it to me.

"By the grace of Heaven, Sir Richard Claybourne is found! Come at once to the Cross Keys.

P. Claybourne

at the Cross Keys,
Wednesday, 10 of ye clock"

"I suppose we must go," said Dr. Johnson.

Wild horses would not have kept me away. We found Lady Claybourne in the wainscotted room abovestairs at the Cross Keys, sitting by the fire in a state of agitation. By her side, in silent concern, stood a grave, smooth-faced person in a decent grey coat. He proved to be Mr. Rollis, the manager of the Claybourne estate. My Lady started up at our advent.

"O bless you, Dr. Johnson, your screed has brought my Richard home to me!"

"Is he here?"

"Not yet. He is but now come into port, and gives me the rendezvous here."

"That is so," murmured Mr. Rollis in a low caressing voice, seating her gently.

"Then, my Lady, how are you sure it is he?" asked Dr. Johnson gravely.

"Old Bogie says so."

"And who is old Bogie?"

"My son's bodyservant from his childhood. To this trusted retainer I gave the task of disseminating your screed in the New World. You understand, Dr. Johnson, I am of French extraction,

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and come from the island of Haiti, where I still possess estates. There Bogie was born and bred, and there, his task done, he was instructed to await developments."

"And there he found Richard?"

"Sir, strolling in the gardens at Port au Prince, by chance he comes face to face with Richard. What, 'tis Bogie! cries Richard. Master Dickie! cries Bogie, and they embrace. In letters sent before, they describe this affecting scene."

"Indeed, my Lady, so they do," asseverated Rollis.

What more these letters imported was not revealed, for just then there was a knock at the door, and two men appeared on the threshold. One of them, a little old Negro with such a face as might have been carven on a walnut shell, was but a shadow behind the shoulder of the other. On this one all eyes fixed.

We saw a tall young man, dark tanned and very thin. His swarthy face, tho' gaunt and worn, yet strikingly resembled my Lady's about the eyes, which were brilliant and dark, with smooth deep lids under arching brows. He smiled her very smile, his delicately cut mouth, so like hers, flashing white teeth. His own dark hair was gathered back with a thong. His right sleeve hung empty.

The length of a heartbeat the room was poised in silence. Then my Lady rose slowly to her feet.

"'Tis Richard," she whispered.

"Aye, 'tis Richard," murmured Rollis.

"'Tis Richard: but O Heaven, how changed!"

In an instant the tall young man went to her, and she gathered him to her bosom. Let us draw the veil over a mother's transports.

After these sacred moments, Richard made known to us his story.

"I went from England," he said, "resolved never to return. But I soon tired of the soldier's restless life, and I resolved to seek some idyllic shade, far from the haunts of man, and there forget the past. From Jamaica I made my way to Haiti. With forged letters and a false name I obtained employment from our own factor on our own plantation. There all went on to a wish, marred only when in the late earthquake I was pinned by a fallen lintel, which paralyzed my right arm (touching the empty sleeve). Alas, Mother, I have brought you back the half of a man."

"Not so!" cried my Lady stoutly. "The arm is there. (So it was, close-clipped to his side within his fustian coat.) We'll have the best surgeons to it, and it shall mend!"

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"Meanwhile," he smiled, "you shall see how my left hand serves."

To proof, he took her white fingers in his brown ones, and kissed them the while my Lady melted in smiles.

"Tho' 'twas my intent never to return," he went on, "your eloquent appeal, making its way to me, moved my heart towards England."

"The thanks be yours, Dr. Johnson," uttered my Lady.

"Aye, our thanks to you," seconded Rollis.

"And so I came down to Port au Prince, with intent to take ship, and there at the dock I met with dear Bogie—"

The black man bowed, and wiped a tear with the heel of a dusky pink palm.

"—and here I am!"

"There will be rejoicing at Claybourne," smiled my Lady. "You must be present, Dr. Johnson, Mr. Boswell."

Assenting, we parted with a promise to visit the Hall for the coming festivities of the Claybourne Dole on St. George's Day.

'Twas April, with spring in the air. We proceeded forthwith into Kent, tho' not to Claybourne Hall. Dr. Johnson had a mind first to visit friends at Kentish Old Priory, hard by.

Our welcome at the Priory, and our diversions thereat, form no part of this tale, except insofar as diversion was afforded at every social gathering by speculation upon the romantic recrudescence of Sir Richard Claybourne. Those who had caught a glimpse of him importantly expatiated on his resemblance to his lady mother. Some even saw in him a look of his late father, Sir Hubert. Others again thought he resembled nobody, and suspected my Lady had been bamboozled by an impostor. She was just asking to be bamboozled, added certain cynics; while the sentimental joyed to share the bliss of a mother's heart.

As to myself, being a lawyer I took it upon me to expatiate in all companies on the great principle of filiation, by which the romantick Douglas Cause had been newly won: that, in brief, if a mother declares *This is my son,* it is so.

Heedless, the young ladies would twitter the while over the folk at Rendle. How were they taking it? How would Cynthia receive the return of her long-lost bridegroom? What would Jeremy say, now that his cousin had returned to cut him out?

As the group around the tea table was enjoyably speculating

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thus, one afternoon, a servant announced:

"Lady Claybourne. Mr. Claybourne."

At the names silence fell, and every head turned. Into the silence stepped a blonde girl in sea-green tissue, snug at her slender waist, and draping softly over a swaying hoop. Her sunny hair was lightly piled up à la Pompadour. There was pride in her carriage, and reserve in her level blue gaze and faint smile.

Attending her, nay, hovering over her, came a broad-shouldered youth in mulberry, whose carelessly ribbanded tawny hair, square jaw, and challenging hazel eye delineated a very John Bull in the making.

Thus I encountered at last Cynthia, Lady Claybourne, whom Richard had loved and left, and Jeremy Claybourne, his cousin and heir.

Constraint fell on the tea table. After a few observes on the weather (very fair for April), the company dispersed. The Claybournes lingered, having come of purpose to bespeak Dr. Johnson's advice in the matter of the claimant at Claybourne Hall.

"They say you have met this person," said Cynthia. "I have not. Tell me, is he Richard indeed?"

"Of course he is not!" uttered Jeremy angrily.

"The great principle of filiation—" I began.

"As you say, Mr. Boswell: the mother avers it is her son. Moreover," added Dr. Johnson, "the man of business says it is Richard; and the old-time servant asserts it is Richard."

"My Lady's too tender heart is set on the fellow," growled Jeremy, "and everybody knows Rollis and Bogie will never gainsay her. She has them under her spell with her coaxing ways: as she has everybody. Only my mother saw thro' her. Cupidity, wilfulness, adultery, bastardy—in such terms my mother spoke of her."

"Enough, Jeremy," said Cynthia quickly, "your mother ever spoke more than she knew about her sister Claybourne."

"Never defend Lady Claybourne," muttered Jeremy, "for she is no friend to you."

"Yet Richard loved me," said the girl. "Can he be Richard, and never come near me?"

"Yet, my dear—if he left you in anger?" murmured Dr. Johnson.

"That is between me and Richard," said Cynthia stiffly.

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"Then there's no more to be said."

"Oh, but there is," countered Cynthia quickly. "I'll not see Jeremy dispossessed by a pretender. Pray, Dr. Johnson, will you not scrutinize this fellow, and detect whether he be Richard indeed, or an impostor?"

"Why, if he be an impostor, 'tis my hand in the business has raised him up," observed Dr. Johnson. "I'll scan him narrowly, you may be sure. But why do you not confront him yourself?"

"The door is closed against me."

"We'll confront him at the Dole," said Jeremy grimly.

"What is this Claybourne Dôle we hear so much about?" I enquired curiously.

"Sir," replied Cynthia, "'tis a whimsy from the Dark Ages, of a death-bed vow to relieve the poor forever, and a death-bed curse, that if 'tis neglected, the Claybourne line shall fail. For six years past Jeremy, as the heir, has upheld the custom; and all Claybournes, even I, must play their part on St. George's Day."

"Which is this day week," remarked Dr. Johnson. "Well, well, I'll note Sir Richard's proceedings in the meantime."

Next day, according to our invitation at the Cross Keys, we became guests at Claybourne Hall. We found the Hall to be a stately Palladian mansion, with classical pilasters and myriad sashwindows taking the light. Here the dowager Lady Claybourne reigned in splendour, and now that her Richard was beside her, all was love and abundance.

Richard indeed moved as one waking out of a dream, from the formal garden to the bluffs above the sea, from the great hall to the portrait gallery. As he stared at the likenesses of his ancestors in the latter, we were enabled to stare at him, as a youth on canvas, as a man in the flesh. As my Lady had said, how changed!

The youthful face in the portrait was smooth and high-coloured. The face of flesh was now thin and sallow. But in both countenances, the fresh and the worn, the look of my Lady was apparent in the large thin-lidded eyes and the curve of lip. In the portrait, young Richard rested his left hand on the hilt of his sword, and held in his right the bridle of his favourite horse.

"Gallant Soldier, remember, mother?" murmured Richard. "He bade fair to be the fastest horse in the county."

"He is so still. You shall ride him yet, my son, when the arm mends."

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Following her glance, I perceived that the useless arm had been coaxed into its sleeve, and saw in the hand the ball of crimson wool whereby, with continual kneading and plying, the atrophied muscles were to be, by little and little, restored to use. The slack fingers with an effort tightened about the crimson wool and loosed it again, tightened and loosed.

"I'll ride Gallant Soldier yet," vowed Sir Richard.

Meanwhile, the swift steed was Richard's delight and wherever he went, out of doors in the fresh April weather, horse and groom were sure to be near him.

The out of doors was Richard's element. The old gamekeeper rejoiced to have him back, and marvelled at his undiminished skill, tho' with the left hand, at angling and fencing and shooting with the pistol; tho' the sporting gun was no longer within his power.

Indoors, other times, the restored Sir Richard would be busied with Mr. Rollis, turning over old deeds or signing new ones, as to the manor born. Mr. Rollis exclaimed in wonder, that the new signature, tho' left-handed, so closely resembled the old.

In certain respects, methought, the long sojourn in the wilds shewed its effects. The skin was leather-tanned by the furnace of the West Indies. The voice was harsh, and so far from smacking of his upbringing in Kent, the manner of speech had a twang that spoke of the years in Haiti.

At table, also, the heir's manners, to my way of thinking, left something to be desired. But what can a man do who must feed himself with one hand? Old Bogie hovered ever at his shoulder, ready to cut his meat; while at his knee, rolling adoring eyes, sat Richard's old dog, a cross fat rug of a thing named Gypsy. I noticed she got more than her share of titbits.

Only once during that week was the name of Cynthia mentioned, when Dr. Johnson took opportunity to say:

"Sir, will you not see your wife?"

Richard shook his head.

"Not yet. Do not ask it. Let me mend first."

"Cynthia's suspense must be painful," observed Dr. Johnson.

Wherever Richard was, my Lady was sure to be close at hand. Now she came between to say coldly:

"Cynthia has Jeremy to console her. Let her alone."

Richard turned away in silence.

St. George's Day, April 23, 1773, dawned fair. Claybourne Hall

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hummed and was redolent with final preparations. At the farther edge of the south meadow they were roasting whole oxen, and putting up long tables on trestles to set forth the viands to come. At the near end a platform under a red and white striped canopy offered shelter against sun or shower, whatever April weather might ensue.

At the Hall as morning advanced, Lady Claybourne bustled about; but Richard did not appear. Soon he would face his first meeting with the world. How would he be received?

At mid-morning, we all attended Sir Richard's levee in the old-fashioned way. A rainbow of splendid garments had been kept furbished for him from his raking days. For this great occasion, he chose a suit of cream brocaded and laced with gold, in which he looked like a bridegroom. A modish new wig with high powdered fore-top well became his flashing dark eyes and haggard face. In this he shewed his only trace of foppery, the outmoded hats and wigs of past days having been condemned *en masse,* and new ones bespoke from London.

My Lady, too, was adorned most like a bride, for she had given over her mourning weeds upon Richard's return, and now wore silver tissue edged with bullion lace. As to me, I had donned my bloom-coloured coat, while Dr. Johnson was satisfied to be decent in chestnut broadcloth.

On the stroke of noon we issued forth to greet the quality and commonalty already gathering to honour the day. Richard vibrated like a wire; my Lady, glowing with joy, never left his side. Thus, strolling in the meadow, we exchanged bows with the neighbouring squires, and nodded condescendingly to the assembling tenantry. Sometimes Richard uttered a name; sometimes he only made a leg, bowed and smiled. His eyes shewed the strain he was under.

As we strolled, suddenly my Lady took in a sibilant breath, and gripped her son's fingers. Two persons stood in our way. Richard uttered one word: "Cynthia!"

Her hand on Jeremy's, the girl stood and eyed the speaker, utterly still. At last she spoke:

"Who are you?"

"I am Sir Richard Claybourne, your humble servant, and your husband that was."

She searched him deep, the sallow face, the dark eyes, the useless arm.

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"Make me believe it," she said. "Answer me but three questions."

"Not now," snapped Lady Claybourne. "The Dole begins."

"I think you must, Sir Richard," said Dr. Johnson gently.

"Very well, sir. But think well, Cynthia, you may not like the answers."

"If true, I shall like them very well. One: when we began our loves (the clear skin rosied), what was my name for you?"

"Dickon," said the claimant instantly.

"No, 'Rich,' you are wrong. Now say: where was our secret post office?"

"In a hollow tree."

"That is true. Which one?"

"Ah, that I have forgotten."

"Never mind. Why did you leave me as you did?"

"You know why."

"I know why. Do you?"

"I beg you, Cynthia, spare me saying it."

"I do not fear to hear it."

Eyes downcast, Richard uttered low: "You force me to say it. Because I found you to be used goods."

Jeremy doubled his fists and aimed a blow, which Richard swiftly fended with his own.

"Stand back, Jeremy," said Cynthia coolly: "he knows he lies."

Jeremy, muttering, dropped his arms, and the claimant followed suit, as the dowager cried:

"Of course the little trollop must deny it. Enough of this farce!"

"Answer me but this, if you be Richard," pursued Cynthia steadily, "what did you say in your farewell note?"

"An unworthy trick, Cynthia, I left you no farewell note."

"Shall I shew it you?"

"I forbid it!" cried the dowager angrily. " 'Tis clear Cynthia will tell any lie, pass any forgery, to do away with you and get the estate for Jeremy. Come, begin the Dole!"

She swept Richard away. At her gesture, he mounted the platform and spoke:

"My people—my dear friends, companions of my youth! Richard is returned, and we shall have better days at Claybourne Hall. I am too moved to say more."

A silence. Would they reject him? Then the cheer burst forth: *Huzza!* It was Mr. Rollis who gave the triple "Hip hip!"

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Bowing, the master of Claybourne reached his hand to his lady mother, and descended to the level. Old Bogie with a basket of loaves and Mr. Rollis with a purse of crown pieces fell in on either side. Jeremy and Cynthia, stiff-backed, followed; and we, Sir Richard's guests, brought up the rear.

Drawn up before the dais, shepherded by friends and relations in gala array, stood two dozen hand-picked and hand-scrubbed antients of days. Clean smocks cloathed the toothless gaffers, and snowy aprons adorned the silver-haired gammers. The Dole began: to each, a gracious word from Sir Richard, a crown piece from Rollis's purse, and a fat brown loaf from Bogie's basket.

The entourage had gone part way down the line, when a boy with a billet pushed through the crowd and handed the folded paper to Sir Richard. The latter snapped it open, read, and scowled. Then he shrugged, threw down the crumpled paper (which in the interest of neatness I retrieved and pocketed for future destruction) and stepped forward to the next curtseying old crone.

There was still bread in the basket and silver in the purse when again a newcomer pushed his way importantly through the crowd. I recognized the burly fellow with his staff and his writ. 'Twas the parish constable, come as I supposed to bear his part in the drama of the Claybourne Dole. At sight of him, Richard stopped stock-still. Then he bowed abruptly, and strode swiftly away. We saw him reach the edge of the meadow, where as usual the favourite steed, Gallant Soldier, saddled and bridled, stood with his groom. The Dole party stood and gaped as Richard leaped to the saddle, slapped the reins two-handed, and tore off at a gallop.

As we stood staring, the dowager rounded on Cynthia.

"You wicked, wicked girl!" she cried. "Now what have you done! You have driven Richard from home a second time!"

"Be that as it may," said Dr. Johnson, "continue the Dole, Sir Jeremy, lest the Curse fall upon you."

Under his commanding eye, the Dole party re-formed about Jeremy. I noticed that the constable, stately with writ and staff, belatedly brought up the rear; and so the Dole was completed.

Cheering, the tenantry broke ranks and attacked the tables; but there was no feasting for us. Marshalled by Dr. Johnson, we found ourselves indoors in the withdrawing room, sitting about on the stiff brocaded chairs as the late sunlight slanted in along the polished floor. We seemed to sit most like a select committee, my-

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self and Cynthia and Jeremy, Lady Claybourne and Rollis and Bogie, with Dr. Johnson as it were in the chair, and the constable like a sergeant-at-arms, solidly established just outside the door.

"Where is Sir Richard?" demanded Mr. Rollis.

"Vanisht," replied Dr. Johnson with a broad smile. "We have put the genie back in the bottle."

"How do you know he is vanisht?"

"Because 'twas I conjured him away."

"Alas for my Lady!" cried generous-hearted Cynthia, "to lose her son a second time."

With a heart-broken gesture, Lady Claybourne put her kerchief to her eyes.

"Save your sympathy, she has not lost him," said Dr. Johnson calmly.

"Unravel this mystery, sir," exclaimed Cynthia.

"I have not all the strands in my fingers, but the master string I have pulled, and the unravelling begins. You have heard the cynical saying, if you should send word to every member of Parliament, *Fly, all is discovered,* the floor would be half empty next day."

In a trice I had out of my pocket the note the claimant had thrown down. *Fly, all is discovered,* it read.

"But he did not fly," I objected.

"Not then," conceded my friend. "But upon the heels of the warning came the constable with his staff and a great writ in his hand—instructed by me, I confess—and that did the business. The false Richard is off, and I venture to suppose he'll not return."

"How could you be so sure he was not the true Richard?" I asked curiously.

"Sir, the affair of Susanna and the elders was my first hint. As the lying elders could not say with one voice under which tree she sinned, so there was no agreement on the scene of that romantick meeting with old Bogie, whether the gardens or the docks. Was there such a meeting? It occurred to me to doubt it. Yet the positive voices of all three, mother, man of business, and old servant, overbore me for the nonce."

"Not to mention," said I, "the devotion of the dog Gypsy at Claybourne."

"Cupboard love," smiled Johnson. "Had you fed her, she would have drooled in *your* lap. No, the dog did not move me. For at Claybourne, I was again observing matter for doubt. There was,

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for instance, the affair of the wigs and hats. The false Richard wore his predecessor's garments very well. But the headgear would not fit; he was obliged to obtain a new supply."

"Moreover," my friend continued, "the real Sir Richard was right-handed. The sword in his portrait was scabbarded to the left, as it must be for a right-handed man to draw. But I soon perceived this fellow was always left-handed. He wrote, he shot, he fished left-handed with the perfect ease of a lifetime. Therefore must his right arm seem to be stricken. Then if he had learned from someone to write like Sir Richard, yet perforce not perfectly, the shift of hand explains all. Thus too, the arm must seem to mend. Who would willingly go one-armed forever?"

"And it mended miraculously," added Jeremy drily, "when I struck at him and he struck back two-fisted."

"So I saw," remarked Dr. Johnson, "tho' 'twas over in the blink of an eye. Yet it shook him, and Cynthia's tests still worse, making him all the more ready to believe *All is discovered,* and fly at once, by that mount he had always ready."

"Then where is the real Sir Ricahrd?" I put the question that was hanging in the air.

"Ah, there's the question," said Dr. Johnson. "Let us ask Cynthia. Forgive me, my dear, do not answer unless you will; but had you really a note of farewell?"

"I will answer," said Cynthia in a low voice, "for Jeremy has the right to know. There was a note of farewell left for me in our hollow tree." Reaching into her bodice, she brought it forth. "Here it is."

With compressed lips, Lady Claybourne turned away. Three heads bent over the yellowing scrap. The message we read was brief and bitter:

> "Now you know me, I am unworthy to touch you. But be comforted, you shall be rid of your incubus when the tide goes out. Farewell, for you'll never see me more.
>
> Rich"

"I made sure he had thrown himself into the sea," whispered Cynthia.

"Dear heart," cried Jeremy, "on his wedding night, why would he so?"

"Because," said Cynthia, low, "he came to me with the French disease, and left me rather than infect me. He was half mad with remorse and drink taken, and I feared what he might do.

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'Twas pure relief when I heard his mother had seen him and set him on his way."

"But had she?" asked Johnson gravely. "—Sit down, Lady Claybourne. You need not answer. I will answer for you. You never saw Richard that night. He was drowned. But you were determined still to rule Claybourne estate, and you had the wit and the will to invent a story to keep you there tho' Richard was gone. How long, think you, Cynthia, could she have remained, had you displayed this everlasting farewell?"

"I was but fourteen, and I wanted so to believe," murmured Cynthia. "But now—I know not."

"Perhaps," said Dr. Johnson, turning a stern face on the old Negro, "perhaps Bogie knows."

The dark eyes darted left and right. No sign came from my Lady, but Jeremy spoke with gruff gentleness:

"Speak up, Bogie. Tell us the truth; it shall not be held against you."

"I know," whispered the black painfully. "When Sir Richard was gone, none knew whither, I was set to search, and so 'twas I found at the cliff top his wedding coat folded, and a note held down by a stone."

"What said the note? Or can you not read?"

"I can read. It began: Honoured Mother, When you read this I shall be dead—"

Cynthia hid her face in her hands.

"I read no more," went on Bogie, "but took coat and note to my Lady in her chamber. She read it dry-eyed, and mused long. At last, Bogie, says she, I learn by this billet that your young master has left England, and we are to keep all things in readiness for his return. Was I to gainsay her?"

Lady Claybourne sat like a figure carved in ice.

"Yet Sir Richard would never return," went on Dr. Johnson, "and Jeremy's guardians became more and more pressing. I suggest that as Jeremy approached his majority, a scheam was conceived to hold the estate, a scheam in which you three—you, my Lady, and Rollis and Bogie—had your parts to play."

"And you too, Dr. Johnson," smiled Rollis, unabashed.

"And I too," said the philosopher wryly. "My part was to be the dupe, and lend my authority to the comedy of 'The Return of the Long Lost Heir.' 'Twas all too pat. He will be found, predicts my Lady like a sybil, and found he is, on her own ground, in Haiti.

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How? Because—as I now perceive—she arranged it—through a trusted messenger; her old slave from Haiti, our friend Mr. Bogie. Well, Bogie?"

The old man almost smiled as he inclined his head.

"But who was he, then, whom Bogie found in Haiti," I demanded, "so miraculously suited to the part?"

"I know not," replied Dr. Johnson; "but I can guess. I think we shall find that there was someone in Haiti whom my Lady sent there out of the way long ago; someone whom she would gladly establish for life at Claybourne Hall; someone who so closely resembled her that he could win wide acceptance as the lost heir. To speak plainly: her son."

"Her *son?*"

"Her bastard son, Sir Jeremy, whose existence your mother railed at in years past. Is that not so, Lady Claybourne?"

My Lady disdained to answer.

"Is that not so, Mr. Rollis?"

"That is so, Dr. Johnson," Mr. Rollis smiled thinly. "The lad was troublesome, and 'twas I who secretly shipped him off for her to the Haiti plantation. Thither my Lady sent Bogie, to instruct him and bring him back. Bogie is not as simple as he seems. Come, my Lady, say this is so, for our best course now is to compound the matter with Sir Jeremy."

"Compound, will you?" said Jeremy darkly. "I'll look to the strong-box first."

"As to the strong-box," said Rollis calmly, "you may set your mind at rest, for I have kept the keys. Tho' in indifferent matters I was ruled by my Lady—"

"D'you call it an indifferent matter, raising me up a false husband!" cried Cynthia indignantly.

"As to that," returned the solicitor coolly, "I never expected my Lady's mad scheam to prevail; and as to the estate, I have kept it faithfully for whoever comes after."

"What impudence!" cried Jeremy. "Dr. Johnson, say, shall we not give these conspirators into custody, and send after the fleeing impostor?"

Lady Claybourne spoke for the first time:

"He'll hang for it. Would you hang your brother, Jeremy?"

"My *brother?*"

"Your father's son."

"Of the blood on both sides!" exclaimed Dr. Johnson. "Small wonder he passed for the heir!"

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"And small wonder my mother railed," added Jeremy.

"Sir Jeremy will not desire a scandal at Claybourne," said my Lady with perfect calm. "He will prefer that I should take my dower right and withdraw to Haiti. My son Paul—whom, as you say, I have not lost—shall join me. Now I will bid you good night. Come, Rollis. Come, Bogie."

"'Tis for the best. Let it be so, Sir Jeremy," said my wise friend.

My Lady, head held high, sailed out at the door, and Rollis and Bogie followed.

"Be it so," assented Jeremy gravely, and the constable let them pass. "Now," he went on, his face softening, "there is but one more word to say. Cynthia (taking her hand)—Lady Claybourne, will you wed with me, and be Lady Claybourne still?"

"Yes, Jeremy," said Cynthia.

"Q"

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE ON PAGES 102-103

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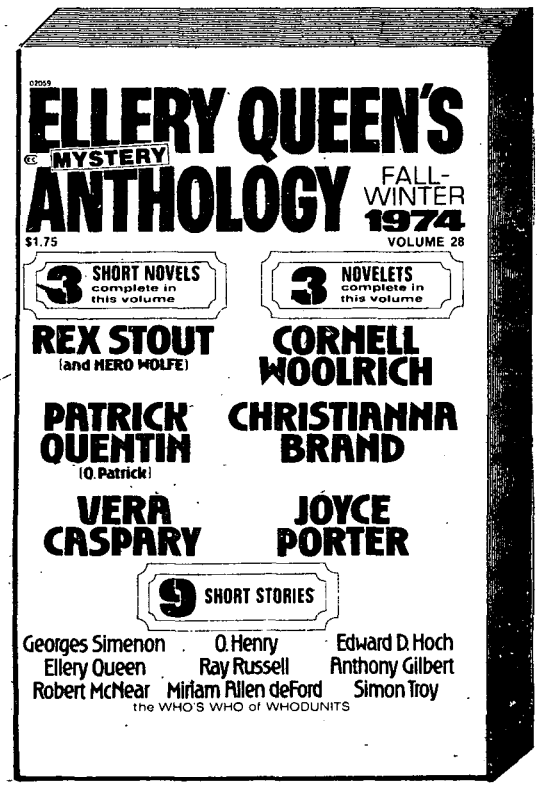

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

There's rather an unusual lineup this month. But, though we shall consider only three volumes, one a two-book anthology, the other a shorter omnibus, these three volumes comprise no less than seventeen novels, quite enough weight for any single assessment.

First, demanding attention, come fourteen classics from as many eminent mystery mongers: six British, seven American, one French. No price being quoted, presumably this is a gift edition. The other item on our list provides a trilogy by the same author; fittingly so, since this eminent practitioner has been omitted from the first collection.

Great Stories of Mystery and Suspense, selected and condensed by the editors of the Reader's Digest (2 vols., Reader's Digest Association) has both high quality and immense scope.

Though high quality may not always attend joint editorship, where tastes so often clash, there should be little argument about most titles included here. I myself have reservations concerning the hard-boiled, but so many able critics oppose me that I shall not dispute the matter in public.

As for the novels' variety, themes range from straight detection to intuitive analysis; from Gothic *frisson* to the convolutions of espionage; from psychological study to slam-bang thrill. Well and sympathetically abridged, they come very near the impossible task of pleasing everybody.

You will find old favorites, as I did. Let me recommend Rex Stout's *The League of Frightened Men,* in which Nero Wolfe makes shrewd comments on the nature of violence as he solves his most fascinating problem. With *The Death of Don Juan,* by Ellery Queen, our own author-detective unravels theatrical tangles from a dying message all but the shrewdest may misinterpret. And what of those marks on the haft of the knife?

The first but perhaps least known exploit of James Bond, Agent 007, touches off sensational spy-drama amid the gambling in Ian

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Fleming's *Casino Royale.* And *Journey into Fear,* by Eric Ambler, scores high marks for one who has been providing tense espionage longer than anyone else in the group. If *The Third Man* may not be Graham Greene's finest effort at undercover chicanery, you won't escape the spell of this enchanter or the machinations of Harry Lyme.

The Franchise Affair, by Josephine Tey, bases both mystery and sensationalism on a famous case from the past, whereas Daphne Du Maurier's *My Cousin Rachel* reverts frankly to the past for the psychological thrill of what perhaps will become a study in murder.

Many well-known characters stride here, including the pride of the Police Judiciare in *Maigret and the Headless Corpse,* or Perry Mason in *The Case of the Crying Swallow.*

Let one word be added in summing up. For special commendation I have chosen only my old favorites. But, whatever may be your tastes or even predjudices in blood and thunder, you can't go wrong with this anthology.

Murder on Board, by Agatha Christie (Dodd, Mead, $7.95), contains *The Mystery of the Blue Train, What Mrs. McGillicuddy Saw,* and *Death in the Air,* three top-notch bafflers from the Mistress of Misdirection.

The Mystery of the Blue Train, with imperious Mrs. Kettering strangled amid suspects during 1928's luxury service from London to the French Riviera, sets Hercule Poirot a challenge in theft as well as murder, and requires penetrating several disguises for its double-shock solution.

Death in the Air, written next though placed last in this trilogy, also features Poirot in poison-sting homicide aboard a Paris-London plane about 1935, eventually reminding us that no two similar coats are quite alike.

What Mrs. McGillicuddy Saw, as recently as '57, deals with violence viewed through one train window from another as stout Mrs. McGillicuddy travels domestic ways to visit her old friend Jane Marple, kindly and successful spinster-sleuth who specializes in domestic crime.

You might try your own wits on problems from various stages of the author's career. Though all the clues are there, be warned and look out! You won't be cheated, but you may hoodwink yourself from such smooth presentation. In matters of this kind, good friends, Dame Agatha can't be trusted one inch.

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"Murder is now an everyday thing" . . .

HARD TIMES

by SONORA MORROW

The two old men sat disconsolately on the park bench. It was past midnight and the street lamp near them cast a small glow over their hunched bodies.

"The world has changed too much and too fast for me," one said. "Murder is now an everyday thing, most of it with no real motive. They kill these days for nickels and dimes, for dislike of a color, for amusement." He shuddered slightly.

The other one sighed and nodded. "And not only that, it's such a noisy world—and the rents! I can remember when I had practically a castle for what it costs me now for a basement apartment. I've worked the night shift all my life and slept like a baby during the day, but *now*—jet planes and sonic booms, hi-fi stereos blaring, car horns honking constantly. I haven't had a decent day's sleep in years."

The first man scratched his face. "When I started, my long hair and beard were distinguished-looking. I mean, people could tell you were something special. Now every lazy bum in the world is running around with hair all over him."

"It's become a sin to be old-fashioned and traditional," the second man said, fingering his frayed collar. "Drugs, that's what's done it, this 'freaking out' and seeing things that don't exist—how can they tell the real from the unreal? How can they react to normality when they don't know what it is?"

"There must be *someplace* we could go and live our normal lives," the first man ventured. "You name it, I'll go with you. There are so many emerging nations in Africa, and I hear Australia and New Zealand are nice places."

The other man looked skyward. Five hours until sunup, he thought. "Maybe Canada,

Do you see the point of this story? Please turn to page 161.

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a *NEW* series character by

EDWARD D. HOCH

For some time now, as our readers have observed, Edward D. Hoch has had a story in every issue of EQMM—occasionally two stories in the same issue, one signed by a pseudonym (R. L. Stevens—there, the cat is out of the bag!). The simple truth is, Mr. Hoch is probably the most prolific writer of consistently interesting short stories in the mystery field today, and it is a pleasure and a privilege to offer you his varied series with such regularity. And if Mr. Hoch maintains his standard of quality—and we have every confidence he will, indeed every confidence he will even raise the quality level of his performance—he will surely achieve a niche in the Mystery Hall of Fame.

Here is the short-story box score for Edward D. Hoch as of February 22, 1974 (note the date): more than 40 stories about Captain Leopold, the straightforward procedural cop whose cases are anything but straightforward; 30 stories about Rand, the code-and-cipher counterspy-detective (all the Rand stories have appeared or are scheduled to appear in EQMM); 25 stories about Nick Velvet, the unique thief who steals only the worthless (all but three have appeared or will appear in EQMM); 5 stories about Sebastian Blue and Laura Charme, Interpol investigators; and stories about Ulysses S. Byrd, con man, and the Lollipop Cop, and at least four other characters.

To date Mr. Hoch has published more than 350 short stories—repeat, 350 short stories—and he is only 44 years old!

We pay this tribute to Mr. Hoch on February 22, 1974, his 44th birthday, and to celebrate the event EQMM is happy to announce the beginning of a new Hoch series—the first story about Dr. Sam Hawthorne, a retired New England doctor, now in his seventies, who looks back to some of the miracle problems in his past . . . .

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THE PROBLEM OF THE COVERED BRIDGE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"You're always hearin' that things were better in the good ol' days. Well, I don't know about that. Certainly medical treatment wasn't better. I speak from experience, because I started my practice as a country doctor up in New England way back in 1922. That seems a lifetime ago now, don't it? Heck, it *is* a lifetime ago!

"I'll tell you one thing that was better, though—the mysteries. The real honest-to-goodness mysteries that happened to ordinary folks like you an' me. I've read lots of mystery stories in my time, but there's never been anything to compare with some of the things I experienced personally.

"Take, for instance, the first winter I was up there. A man drove his horse and buggy through the snow into a covered bridge and never came out t'other end. All three vanished off the face o' the earth, as if they'd never existed!

"You want to hear about it? Heck, it won't take too long to tell. Pull up your chair while I get us—ah—a small libation."

I'd started my practice in Northmont on January 22, 1922 (the old man began). I'll always remember the date, 'cause it was the very day Pope Benedict XV died. Now I'm not Catholic myself, but in that part of New England a lot of the people are. The death of the Pope was a lot bigger news that day than the openin' of Dr. Sam Hawthorne's office. Nevertheless, I hired a pudgy woman named April for a nurse, bought some second-hand furniture, and settled in.

Only a year out of medical school, I was pretty new at the game. But I made friends easily, 'specially with the farm families out along the creek. I'd driven into town in my 1921 Pierce-Arrow Runabout, a blazin' yellow extravagance that set my folks back nearly $7,000 when they gave it to me as a graduation gift. It took me only one day to realize that families in rural New England didn't drive Pierce-Arrow Runabouts. Fact is, they'd never even seen one before.

The problem of the car was solved quickly enough for the winter months when I found out that people in this area

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lucky enough to own automobiles cared for them during the cold weather by drainin' the gas tanks and puttin' the cars up on blocks till spring arrived. It was back to the horse an' buggy for the trips through the snow, an' I figured that was okay by me. In a way it made me one of them.

When the snow got too deep they got out the sleighs. This winter, though, was provin' unusually mild. The cold weather had froze over the ice on Snake Creek for skatin', but there was surprisin' little snow on the ground and the roads were clear.

On this Tuesday mornin' in the first week of March I'd driven my horse an' buggy up the North Road to the farm of Jacob an' Sara Bringlow. It had snowed a couple of inches overnight, but nothin' to speak of, and I was anxious to make my weekly call on Sara. She'd been ailin' since I first come to town and my Tuesday visits to the farm were already somethin' of a routine.

This day, as usual, the place seemed full o' people. Besides Jacob and his wife there were the three children—Hank, the handsome 25-year-old son who helped his pa work the farm, and Susan an' Sally, the 16-year-old twin daughters. Hank's intended, Millie O'Brian, was there too, as she often was those days. Millie was a year younger than Hank, an' they sure were in love. The wedding was already scheduled for May, and it would be a big affair. Even the rumblings 'bout Millie marryin' into a non-Catholic family had pretty much died down as the big day grew nearer.

" 'Lo, Dr. Sam," Sally greeted me as I entered the kitchen.

I welcomed the warmth of the stove after the long cold drive. "Hello, Sally. How's your ma today?"

"She's up in bed, but she seems pretty good."

"Fine. We'll have her on her feet in no time."

Jacob Bringlow and his son entered through the shed door, stampin' the snow from their boots. "Good day, Dr. Sam," Jacob said. He was a large man, full of thunder like an Old Testament prophet. Beside him, his son Hank seemed small and slim and a bit underfed.

"Good day to you," I said. "A cold mornin'!"

" 'Tis that. Sally, git Dr. Sam a cup o' coffee—can't you see the man's freezin'?"

I nodded to Hank. "Out cuttin' firewood?"

"There's always some to cut."

Hank Bringlow was a likeable young chap about my own

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age. It seemed to me he was out of place on his pa's farm, and I was happy that the wedding would soon take him away from there. The only books an' magazines in the house belonged to Hank, and his manner was more that of a fun-lovin' scholar than a hard-workin' farmer. I knew he and Millie planned to move into town after their marriage, and I 'spected it would be a good thing for both of 'em.

Millie always seemed to be workin' in the kitchen when I made my calls. Maybe she was tryin' to convince the family she could make Hank a good wife. By the town's standards she was a pretty girl, though I'd known prettier ones at college.

She carefully took the coffee cup from young Sally an' brought it to me as I found a place to sit. "Just move those magazines, Dr. Sam," she said.

"Two issues of *Hearst's International?*" It wasn't a magazine frequently found in farmhouses.

"February and March. Hank was readin' the new two-part Sherlock Holmes story."

"They're great fun," I admitted. "I read them a lot in medical school."

Her smile glowed at me. "Mebbe you'll be a writer like Dr. Conan Doyle," she said.

"I doubt that." The coffee was good, warming me after the cold drive. "I really should see Mrs. Bringlow an' finish this later."

"You'll find her in good spirits."

Sara Bringlow's room was at the top of the stairs. The first time I went in, back in January, I found a weak, pale woman in her fifties with a thickened skin and dulled senses, who might have been very close to death. Now the scene was different. Even the room seeemed more cheerful, an' certainly Sara Bringlow was more vividly alive than I'd ever seen her. Sittin' up in bed, with a bright pink shawl thrown over her shoulders, she welcomed me with a smile. "See, I'm almost all better! Do you think I can git up this week?"

Her illness today would probably be classed as a form of thyroid condition called myxedema, but we didn't use such fancy words back then. I'd treated her, an' she was better, an' that was all I cared about. "Tell you what, Sara, you stay in bed till Friday an' then you can get up if you feel like it." I winked at her 'cause I knew she liked me to. "If truth be known, I'll bet you been sneakin' out of that bed already!"

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"Now how would you know that, Doctor?"

"When Sally met me at the door I asked how you were and she said you were up in bed but seemed pretty good. Well now, where else would you be? The only reason for her sayin' it like that was if you'd been up and about sometime recently."

"Land sakes, you should be a detective, Dr. Sam!"

"I have enough to do bein' a doctor." I took her pulse and blood pressure as I talked. "I see we had some more snow this mornin'."

"Yes indeed! The children will have to shovel off the ice before they go skatin' again."

"The wedding's gettin' mighty close now, isn't it?" I suspected the forthcomin' nuptials were playin' a big part in her recovery.

"Yep, just two months away. It'll be a happy day in my life. I s'pose it'll be hard on Jacob, losin' Hank's help around the farm, but he'll manage. I told him the boy's twenty-five now—got to lead his own life."

"Millie seems like a fine girl."

"Best there is! Catholic, of course, but we don't hold that agin' her. 'Course her folks would rather she married Walt Rumsey on the next farm, now that he owns it an' all, but Walt's over thirty—too old for a girl like Millie. I 'spect she knowed that too, when she broke off with him."

There was a gentle knock on the door and Susan, the other twin, came in. "Momma, Hank's gettin' ready to go. He wants to know about that applesauce for Millie's ma."

"Land sakes, I near forgot! Tell him to take a jar off the shelf in the cellar."

After she'd gone I said, "Your daughters are lovely girls."

"They are, aren't they? Tall like their father. Can you tell them apart?"

I nodded. "They're at an age where they want to be individuals. Sally's wearin' her hair a mite different now."

"When they were younger, Hank was always puttin' them up to foolin' us, changin' places and such." Then, as she saw me close my bag, her eyes grew serious for a minute. "Dr. Sam, I *am* better, aren't I?"

"Much better. The thickenin' of your skin is goin' away, and you're much more alert."

I left some more of the pills she'd been takin' and went back downstairs. Hank Bringlow was bundled into a fur-collared coat, ready for the trip to Millie's house. It was about two miles down the windin' road, past the Rumsey farm and across the covered bridge.

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Hank picked up the quart jar of applesauce and said, "Dr. Sam, why don't you ride along with us? Millie's pa hurt his foot last week. He'd never call a doctor for it, but since you're so close maybe you should take a look."

Millie seemed surprised by his request, but I had no objection. "Glad to. I'll follow you in my buggy."

Outside, Hank said, "Millie, you ride with Dr. Sam so he doesn't get lost."

She snorted at that. "The road doesn't go anywhere else, Hank!"

But she climbed into my buggy an' I took the reins. "I hear tell you've got yourself a fancy yellow car, Dr. Sam."

"It's up on blocks till spring. This buggy is good enough for me." Mine was almost the same as Hank's—a four-wheeled carriage with a single seat for two people, pulled by one horse. The fabric top helped keep out the sun and rain, but not the cold. And ridin' in a buggy during a New England winter could be mighty cold!

The road ahead was windin', with woods on both sides. Though it was nearly noon, the tracks of Hank's horse an' buggy were the only ones ahead of us in the fresh snow. Not many people came up that way in the winter. Before we'd gone far, Hank speeded up and disappeared from sight round a bend in the road.

"Hank seems so unlike his pa," I said, making conversation.

"That's because Jacob is his stepfather," Millie explained. "Sara's first husband—Hank's real father—died of typhoid when he was a baby. She remarried and then the twins were born."

"That explains the gap."

"Gap?"

"Nine years between Hank and his sisters. Farm families usually have their children closer together."

Hank's buggy was still far enough ahead to be out of sight, but now the Rumsey farm came into view. We had to pause a minute as Walt Rumsey blocked the road with a herd of cows returnin' to the barn. He waved and said, "Hank just passed."

"I know," Millie called back. "He goes so fast we can't keep up with him."

When the cows were gone I speeded up, still following the track of Hank's buggy in the snow. As we rounded the next corner I thought we'd see him, 'cause the road was now straight and the woods on both sides had ended. But there was only the covered bridge ahead, and the empty road runnin'

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beyond it to the O'Brian farm.

"Where is he?" Millie asked, puzzled.

"He must be waitin' for us inside the bridge." From our angle we couldn't yet see through it all the way.

"Prob'ly," she agreed with a chuckle. "He always says that covered bridges are kissin' bridges, but that's not true at all."

"Where I come from—" I began, and then paused. The interior of the bridge could be seen now, and no horse an' buggy were waitin' inside. "Well, he certainly went in. You can see the tracks in the snow."

"But—" Millie was half standing now in her seat. "Something's there on the floor of the bridge. What is it?"

We rode up to the bridge entrance and I stopped the horse. There were no windows cut into the sides of this covered bridge, but the light from the ends and from between the boards was enough to see by. I got down from the buggy. "It's his jar of applesauce," I said. "It smashed when it fell from the buggy."

But Millie wasn't lookin' at the applesauce. She was starin' straight ahead at the unmarked snow beyond the other end of the fifty-foot bridge. "Dr. Sam!"

"What is it?"

"There are no tracks goin' off the bridge! He came into it, but he didn't leave it! Dr. Sam, *where is he?*"

She was right, by gum! The tracks of Hank's horse an' buggy led into the bridge. Fact is, the damp imprint of the meltin' snow could be seen for several feet before it gradually faded away.

But there was no horse, no buggy, no Hank Bringlow.

Only the broken jar of applesauce he'd been carrying.

But if he hadn't disturbed the snow at the far end of the bridge, he must be—he *had* to be—still here! My eyes went up to the patterned wooden trusses that held the bridge together. There was nothing—nothing but the crossbeams and the roof itself. The bridge was in remarkably good shape, protected from weathering by its roof. Even the sides were sturdy and unbroken. Nothin' bigger than a squirrel could've fit between the boards.

"It's some sort of trick," I said to Millie. "He's got to be here!"

"But *where?*"

I walked to the other end of the bridge and examined the unmarked snow. I peered around the corner o' the bridge at the frozen surface of Snake Creek. The skaters had not yet shoveled off the snow, and it was as unmarked as the rest.

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Even if the horse an' buggy had passed somehow through the wooden floor or the sides o' the bridge, there was no place they could've gone without leavin' a mark. Hank had driven his buggy into the bridge with Millie an' me less than a minute behind him, dropped his quart jar o' applesauce, and vanished.

"We've got to get help," I said. Instinct told me I shouldn't disturb the snow beyond the bridge by goin' forward to Millie's house. "Wait here an' I'll run back to Rumsey's farm."

I found Walt Rumsey in the barn with his cows, forkin' hay out of the loft. " 'Lo, Doc," he called down to me. "What's up?"

"Hank Bringlow seems to have disappeared. Darnedest thing I ever saw. You got a telephone here?"

"Sure have, Doc." He hopped down to the ground. "Come on in the house."

As I followed him through the snow I asked, "Did Hank seem odd in any way when he went past you?"

"Odd? No. He was bundled up against the cold, but I knew it was him. I kept my cows to the side o' the road till he passed."

"Did he say anything?"

"No, just waved."

"Then you didn't actually see his face or hear his voice?"

Walt Rumsey turned to me. "Wa-el, no. But hell, I've known Hank mosta my life! It was him, all right."

An' I s'pose it had to be. No substitution o' drivers could've been made anywhere along the road, and even if a substitution had been made, how did the substitute disappear?

I took the phone that Walt Rumsey offered, cranked it up, and asked for the Bringlow farm. One of the twins answered. "This is Dr. Sam. We seem to have lost your brother. He didn't come back there, did he?"

"No. Isn't he with you?"

"Not right now. Your pa around?"

"He's out in the field somewhere. You want Momma?"

"No. She should stay in bed." No need to bother her yet. I hung up an' called the O'Brian farm with the same results. Millie's brother Larry answered the phone. He'd seen nothin' of Hank, but he promised to start out on foot toward the bridge at once, searchin' for buggy tracks or footprints.

"Any luck?" Rumsey asked when I'd finished.

"Not yet. You didn't happen to watch him after he passed, did you?"

Rumsey shook his head. "I was busy with the cows."

I went back outside and

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headed for the bridge, with Rumsey taggin' along. Millie was standin' by my horse an' buggy, lookin' concerned. "Did you find him?" she asked.

I shook my head. "Your brother's on his way over."

While Rumsey and I went over every inch of the covered bridge, Millie simply stood at the far end, watchin' for her brother. I guess she needed him to cling to just then. Larry O'Brian was young, handsome, an' likeable—a close friend of both Hank Bringlow an' Walt Rumsey. My nurse April told me that when Walt inherited the farm after his folks' death, both Larry and Hank helped him with the first season's planting. She'd also told me that despite their friendship Larry was against Hank marryin' his sister. P'raps, like some brothers, he viewed no man as worthy of the honor.

When Larry arrived he had nothing new to tell us. "No tracks between here an' the farm," he confirmed.

I had a thought. "Wait a minute! If there aren't any tracks, how in heck did you get over here this mornin', Millie?"

"I was with Hank at his place last night. When the snow started, the family insisted I stay over. We only got a couple of inches, though." She seemed to sense an unasked question, and she added, "I slept with the twins in their big bed."

Larry looked at me. "What d'you think?"

I stared down at the smashed quart of applesauce which everyone had carefully avoided. "I think we better call Sheriff Lens."

Sheriff Lens was a fat man who moved slowly and thought slowly (Doctor Sam continued). He'd prob'ly never been confronted with any crime bigger than buggy stealin'—certainly nothin' like the disappearance from the covered bridge. He grunted and rasped as he listened to the story, then threw up his hands in dismay. "It couldn'ta happened the way you say. The whole thing's impossible, an' the impossible jest don't make sense. I think you're all foolin' me—maybe havin' an April Fool joke three weeks early."

It was about then that the strain finally got to Millie. She collapsed in tears, and Larry and I took her home. Their pa, Vincent O'Brian, met us at the door. "What is this?" he asked Larry. "What's happened to her?"

"Hank's disappeared."

"Disappeared? You mean run off with another woman?"

"No, nothin' like that."

While Larry helped Millie to

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her room, I followed Vincent into the kitchen. He wasn't the hulkin' ox of a man that Jacob Bringlow was, but he still had the muscles of a lifetime spent in the field. "Hank wanted me to come along," I explained. "Said you'd hurt your foot."

"It's nothin'. Twisted my ankle choppin' wood."

"Can I see it?"

"No need." But he pulled up his pants leg reluctantly and I stooped to examine it. Swellin' and bruisin' were pronounced, but the worst was over.

"Not too bad," I agreed. "But you should be soakin' it." Glancing around to be sure we weren't overheard, I lowered my voice and added, "Your first thought was that Hank Bringlow had run off with another woman. Who did you have in mind?"

He looked uneasy. "Nobody special."

"This may be serious, Mr. O'Brian."

He thought about it and finally said, "I won't pretend I'm happy about my daughter marryin' a non-Catholic. Larry feels the same way. Besides, Hank fools around with the girls in town."

"For instance?"

"For instance Gert Page at the bank. Wouldn't be surprised he run off with her."

I saw Millie comin' back downstairs and I raised my voice a bit. "You soak that ankle now, in good hot water."

"Has there been any word?" Millie asked. She'd recovered her composure, though her face still lacked color.

"No word, but I'm sure he'll turn up. Was he in the habit of playin' tricks?"

"Sometimes he'd fool people with Susan an' Sally. Is that what you mean?"

"Don't know what I mean," I admitted. "But he seemed anxious for you to ride with me. Maybe there was a reason."

I stayed for lunch, and when no word came I headed back to town alone. The Sheriff an' some others were still at the covered bridge when I rode through it, but I didn't stop. I could see they'd gotten nowhere toward solvin' the mystery, and I was anxious to get to the bank before it closed.

Gert Page was a hard-eyed blonde girl of the sort who'd never be happy in a small New England town. She answered my questions 'bout Hank Bringlow with a sullen distrust she might have felt towards all men.

"Do you know where he is, Gert?"

"How would I know where he is?"

"Were you plannin' to run off

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with him before his marriage?"

"Ha! Me run off with him? Listen, if Millie O'Brian wants him that bad, she can have him!" The bank was closin' and she went back to countin' the cash in her drawer. "B'sides, I hear tell men get tired of married life after a bit. I just might see him in town again. But I sure won't run off with him and be tied to one man!"

I saw Roberts, the bank's manager, watchin' us and I wondered why they kept a girl like Gert on the payroll. I 'spected she was most unpopular with the bank's lady customers.

As I left the bank I saw Sheriff Lens enterin' the general store across the street. I followed and caught him at the pickle barrel. "Anything new, Sheriff?"

"I give it up, Doc. Wherever he is, he ain't out by the bridge."

The general store, which was right next to my office, was a cozy place with great wheels of cheese, buckets o' flour, an' jars o' taffy kisses. The owner's name was Max, and his big collie dog always slept on the floor near the potbellied stove. Max came around the counter to join us and said, "Everyone's talkin' about young Hank. What do you think happened?"

"No idea," I admitted.

"Couldn't an aeroplane have come over an' picked up the whole shebang?"

"I was right behind him in my buggy. There was no aeroplane." I glanced out the window and saw Gert Page leavin' the bank with the manager, Roberts. "I hear some gossip that Hank was friendly with Gert Page. Any truth to it?"

Max scratched the stubble on his chin and laughed. "Everybody in town is friendly with Gert, includin' ol' Roberts there. It don't mean nothin'."

"I guess not," I agreed. But if it hadn't meant anything to Hank Bringlow, had it meant somethin' to Millie's pa an' brother?

Sheriff Lens and I left the general store together. He promised to keep me informed and I went next door to my office. My nurse April was waitin' for all the details. "My God, you're famous, Dr. Sam! The telephone ain't stopped ringin'!"

"Hell of a thing to be famous for. I didn't see a thing out there."

"That's the point! Anyone else they wouldn't believe—but you're somethin' special."

I sighed and kicked off my damp boots. "I'm just another country doctor, April."

She was a plump jolly woman in her thirties, and I'd never

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regretted hirin' her my first day in town. "They think you're smarter'n most, Dr. Sam."

"Well, I'm not."

"They think you can solve this mystery."

Who else had called me a detective that day? Sara Bringlow? "Why do they think that?"

"I guess because you're the first doctor in town ever drove a Pierce-Arrow car."

I swore at her but she was laughin' and I laughed too. There were some patients waitin' in the outer office and I went to tend to them. It was far from an ordinary day, but I still had my practice to see to. Towards evening, by the time I'd finished, the weather had turned warmer. The temperature hovered near 40 and a gentle rain began to fall.

"It'll git rid o' the snow," April said as I left for the day.

"Ayah, it'll do that."

"Mebbe it'll uncover a clue."

I nodded, but I didn't believe it. Hank Bringlow had gone far away, and the meltin' snow wasn't about to bring him back.

The telephone woke me at four the next mornin'. "This is Sheriff Lens, Doc," the voice greeted me. "Sorry to wake you, but I gotta bad job for you."

"What's that?"

"We found Hank Bringlow."

"Where?"

"On the Post Road, about ten miles south o' town. He's sittin' in his buggy like he jest stopped for a rest."

"Is he—?"

"Dead, Doc. That's what I need you for. Somebody shot him in the back o' the head."

It took me near an hour (Doctor Sam went on) to reach the scene, drivin' the horse an' buggy fast as I could over the slushy country roads. Though the night was mild, the rain chilled me to the bone as I rode through the darkness on that terrible mission. I kept thinkin' about Millie O'Brian, and Hank's ma only just recoverin' from her lengthy illness. What would the news do to them?

Sheriff Lens had some lanterns out in the road, and I could see their eerie glow as I drove up. He helped me down from the buggy an' I walked over to the small circle of men standin' by the other rig. Two of them were deputies, another was a farmer from a nearby house. They hadn't disturbed the body—Hank still sat slumped in a corner o' the seat, his feet wedged against the front o' the buggy.

I drew a sharp breath when I saw the back of his head. "Shotgun," I said curtly.

"Can you tell if it happened here, Doc?"

"Doubtful." I turned to the

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farmer. "Did you find him?"

The man nodded and repeated a story he'd obviously told 'em already. "My wife heard the horse. We don't git nobody along this road in the middle o' the night, so I come out to look around. I found him like this."

In the flare of lantern light I noticed somethin'—a round mark on the horse's flank that was sensitive to my touch. "Look here, Sheriff."

"What is it?"

"A burn. The killer loaded Hank into the buggy an' then tied the reins. He singed the horse with a cigar or somethin' to make it run. Could've run miles before it stopped from exhaustion."

Lens motioned to his deputies. "Let's take him into town. We won't find nothin' else out here." He turned back to me. "At least he's not missin' any more."

"No, he's not missin'. But we still don't know what happened on that bridge. We only know it wasn't any joke."

The funeral was held two days later, on Friday mornin', with a bleak winter sun breakin' through the overcast to throw long March shadows across the tombstones of the little town cemetery. The Bringlows were all there, 'course, and Millie's folks, and people from town. Afterwards many of us went back to the Bringlow farm. It was a country custom, however sad the occasion, and many neighbors brought food for the family.

I was sittin' in the parlor, away from the others, when the bank manager, Roberts, came up to me.

"Has the Sheriff found any clues yet?" he asked.

"Nothin' I know of."

"It's a real baffler. Not just the *how,* but the *why.*"

"The *why?*"

He nodded. "When you're goin' to kill someone you just do it. You don't rig up some fantastic scheme for them to disappear first. What's the point?"

I thought about that, and I didn't have a ready answer. When Roberts drifted away I went over to Sara Bringlow and asked how she was feelin'. She looked at me with tired eyes and said, "My first day outta bed. To bury my son."

There was no point arguin' with a mother's grief. I saw Max bringin' in a bag of groceries from his store and I started over to help him. But my eye caught somethin' on the parlor table. It was the March issue of *Hearst's International.* I remembered Hank had been reading the Sherlock Holmes

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story in the February and March issues. I located the February one under a stack o' newspapers and turned to the Holmes story.

It was in two parts, and called *The Problem of Thor Bridge*.

Bridge?

I found a quiet corner and sat down to read.

It took me only a half hour, and when I finished I sought out Walt Rumsey from the next farm. He was standin' with Larry O'Brian on the side porch, an' when he saw me comin' he said, "Larry's got some good bootleg stuff out in his buggy. Want a shot?"

"No, thanks, Walt. But you can do somethin' else for me. Do you have a good stout rope in your barn?"

He frowned in concentration. "I s'pose so."

"Could we ride over there now? I just read somethin' that gave me an idea about how Hank might've vanished from that bridge."

We got into his buggy an' drove the mile down the windin' road to his farm. The snow was melted by this time, and the cows were clustered around the water trough by the side of the barn. Walt took me inside, past empty stalls an' milk cans an' carriage wheels, to a big shed attached to the rear. Here, among assorted tools, he found a twelve-foot length of worn hemp.

"This do you?"

"Just the thing. Want to come to the bridge with me?"

The ice of the creek was still firm, though the road had turned to mud. I handed one end o' the rope to Rumsey and played out the other end till it reached the edge of the frozen creek. "What's this all about?" he asked.

"I read a story 'bout a gun that vanished off a bridge by bein' pulled into the water."

He looked puzzled. "But Hank's buggy couldn'ta gone into the crick. The ice was unbroken."

"All the same I think it tells me somethin'. Thanks for the use o' the rope."

He took me back to the Bringlow house, puzzled but unquestioning. The mourners were beginning to drift away, and I sought out Sheriff Lens. "I've got an idea about this mystery, Sheriff. But it's sort of crazy."

"In this case, even a crazy idea would be welcome."

Jacob Bringlow, tall and unbent from the ordeal of the funeral, came around the corner o' the house with one of the twins. "What is it, Sheriff?" he asked. "Still searchin' for clues?"

"We may have one," I said. "I got an idea."

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He eyed me up an' down, p'raps blamin' me for what happened to his stepson. "You stick to your doctorin'," he said with a slur, and I knew he'd been samplin' Larry's bottle. "Go look at my wife. She don't seem right to me."

I went inside and found Sara pale and tired-looking. I ordered her up to bed and she went without argument. Max was leavin', and so was the O'Brian family. The banker had already gone. But when I went back on the porch, Jacob Bringlow was still waitin' for me. He was lookin' for trouble. Maybe it was a mixture of grief and bootleg whiskey.

"Sheriff says you know who killed Hank."

"I didn't say that. I just got an idea."

"Tell me. Tell us all!"

He spoke loudly, and Larry O'Brian paused with Millie to listen. Walt Rumsey came over too. In the distance, near the buggies, I saw Gert Page from the bank. I hadn't seen her at the funeral, but she'd come to pay some sort of last respects to Hank.

"We can talk about it inside," I replied, keepin' my voice down.

"You're bluffin'! You don't know a thing!"

I drew a deep breath. "All right, if you want it like this. Hank was reading a Sherlock Holmes story before he died. There's another one he prob'ly read years ago. In it Holmes calls Watson's attention to the curious incident of the dog in the night-time. I could echo his words."

"But there was no dog in the night-time," Sheriff Lens pointed out. "There's no dog in this whole danged case!"

"My mistake," I said. "Then let me direct your attention to the curious incident of the cows in the daytime."

It was then that Walt Rumsey broke from the group and ran towards his buggy. "Grab him, Sheriff!" I shouted. "He's your murderer!"

I had to tell it all to April, back at my office, because she hadn't been there and wouldn't believe it otherwise. "Come on, Dr. Sam! How did the cows tell you Walt was the killer?"

"He was bringin' them back to the barn, across the road, as we passed. But from where? Cows don't graze in the snow, and their waterin' trough is next to the barn, not across the road. The only possible reason for the cows crossin' the road in front of us was to obliterate the tracks of Hank's horse an' buggy.

"Except for those cows, the snow was unbroken by any-

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thing but the single buggy track—all the way from the Bringlow farm to the covered bridge. We know Hank left the farm. If he never reached the bridge, whatever happened to him had to happen at the point where those cows crossed the road."

"But the tracks to the bridge! You were only a minute behind him, Dr. Sam. That wasn't long enough for him to fake those tracks!"

I smiled, runnin' over the reasonin' as it first came to me. "Roberts the banker answered that one, along with Sherlock Holmes. Roberts asked *why*–why did the killer go to all that trouble? And the answer was that he didn't. It wasn't the killer but Hank Bringlow who went to all the trouble.

"We already knew he'd fooled people with his twin sisters, confusin' their identities. And we knew he'd recently read *The Problem of Thor Bridge,* which has an impossible suicide of sorts takin' place on a bridge. It's not too far-fetched to imagine him arrangin' the ultimate joke—his own disappearance from that covered bridge."

"But *how,* Dr. Sam?" April wanted to know. "I read that Sherlock Holmes story too, an' there's nothin' in it like what happened here."

"True. But as soon as I realized the purpose o' those noonday cows, I knew somethin' had happened to those tracks at the barn. And only one thing could've happened—Hank's buggy turned off the road and went *into* the barn. The tracks from the road to the bridge were faked."

"How?" she repeated, not yet ready to believe a word of it.

"*When* is the more important question. Since there was no time to fake the tracks in the single minute before we came along, they had to have been done earlier. Hank and Walt Rumsey must've been in cahoots on the scheme. Walt went out that mornin', after the snow had stopped, with a couple o' old carriage wheels linked together by an axle. On his boots he'd fastened blocks o' wood a couple o' inches thick, with horseshoes nailed to the bottoms.

"He simply trotted along the road, through the snow, pushin' the pair o' wheels ahead of him. He went into the bridge far enough to leave traces o' snow, then reversed the blocks o' wood on his boots and pushed the wheels back again. The resultin' tracks looked like a four-footed animal pullin' a four-wheeled buggy."

"But—" April started to object.

"I know, I know! A man

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doesn't run like a horse. But with practise he could space the prints to look good enough. And I'll bet Hank an' Walt practised plenty while they waited for the right mornin' when the snow was fresh but not too deep. If anyone had examined the tracks o' the horse carefully, they'd've discovered the truth. Careful as he was, Walt Rumsey's prints comin' back from the bridge woulda been a bit different, hittin' the snow from the opposite direction. But they figured I'd drive my buggy up to the bridge in his tracks, all but obliteratin' them, which is what I did. They couldn't really be examined then."

"You're forgettin' the broken jar o' applesauce," April said. "Don't that prove Hank was *on* the bridge?"

"Nothing of the sort! Hank knew in advance his ma planned to send the applesauce to Mrs. O'Brian. He prob'ly suggested it, and he certainly reminded her of it. He simply gave Walt Rumsey a duplicate jar a day or two earlier, an' it was that jar Walt broke on the bridge. The jar Hank was carrying went with him into Walt's barn."

"What if it hadn't snowed that mornin'? What if someone else came along first to leave other tracks?"

I shrugged. "They would've phoned one another and postponed it, I s'pose. It was only meant as a joke. They'd have tried again some other day, with other witnesses. They didn't really need me an' Millie."

"Then how did it turn from a joke to murder?"

"Walt Rumsey had never given up lovin' Millie, or hatin' Hank for takin' her away from him. After the trick worked so well, he saw the perfect chance to kill Hank and win her back. Once I knew he was in on the trick, he had to be the killer—else why was he keepin' quiet 'bout his part in it?

"Hank had hidden his horse an' buggy in that big shed behind the Rumsey barn. When we all went back to town, an' Hank was ready to reappear an' have a good laugh on everyone, Walt Rumsey killed him. Then he waited till dark to dispose of the body on the Post Road. He drove the buggy part way, turned the horse loose to run, and walked home.

"This mornin' after the funeral I made an excuse of wantin' a piece of rope so I could see the inside of Rumsey's barn again. He had spare carriage wheels there, and the shed was big enough to hold a horse an' buggy. That was all the confirmation I needed."

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April leaned back and smiled, convinced at last. "After this they'll probably give the you the Sheriff's job, Dr. Sam."

I shook my head. "I'm just a country doctor."

"A country doctor with a Pierce-Arrow car!" . . .

"That's the way it happened, back in '22. I've often thought I should write it up now that I'm retired, but there's just never enough time. Sure, I've got other stories. Lots of 'em! Can I get you another—ah—small libation?"

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HARD TIMES by SONORA MORROW

(continued from page 139)

it's so big and so beautiful with dozens of scattered settlements—no more big cities for me."

They were sitting quietly in meditation when a ski-masked man leaped in front of them brandishing a large gun.

"Okay, old men, let's have your money, and believe me, I'd just as soon shoot you as look at you."

The two old men looked at each other and smiled.

"Shall I take him or do you want to, Wolf?" the second man asked.

"Be my guest, Count Dracula," gestured the hairy man.

"Q"

INDEX TO VOLUME SIXTY-FOUR — JULY-DECEMBER 1974

AMLAW, MARY: Farewell, Beloved ..... Aug. 80
ANONYMOUS: Dr. Donne Detects ..... Aug. 99
ASIMOV, ISAAC: A Chip of the Black Stone ..... July 6
All in the Way You Read It ..... Sept. 6
Confessions of an American Cigarette Smoker ..... Dec. 26
AVALLONE, MICHAEL: Queen's Quisine ..... Aug. 43
BANKIER, WILLIAM: The Big Bunco ..... Nov. 110
BECKMAN, JANE: Here Comes the Bride ..... Oct. 61
BENSEN, D. R.: Criminalimerick (Black Widowers: 4) ..... July 22
Criminalimerick (Black Widowers: 5) ..... Sept. 21
BENTLEY, PHYLLIS: Miss Phipps Meets a Dog ..... Oct. 52
BREEN, JON L.: Designated Murderer ..... July 67
CAIL, CAROL: Getaway ..... Aug. 35
CALLAHAN, BARBARA: The Sin Painter ..... Aug. 90
CARR, JOHN DICKSON: The Jury Box ..... July-Dec.
CHRISTIE, AGATHA: Strange Jest ..... Dec. 92
CRISPIN, EDMUND: Death and Aunt Fancy ..... Dec. 42
de la TORRE, LILLIAN: The Lost Heir ..... Dec. 119
DiGIOIA, M.: The Last Word Sept. 28
ECKELS, ROBERT EDWARD: The Switcheroo ..... Sept. 22
The K'ang Sheng Memorandum ..... Oct. 75
FERRARS, E. X.: Undue Influence ..... Sept. 66
FISH, ROBERT L.: The Adventure of Black, Peter .. July 85

(Continued on next page)

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(Continued from previous page)

FRANCIS, DICK: The Big Story — Dec. 7
GILBERT, MICHAEL: Who Has Seen the Wind? — Dec. 65
GRIMALDI, LAURA: Affirmation of Truth — Nov. 42
HARRINGTON, JOYCE: Things Change — July 23
The Cabin in the Hollow — Oct. 38
HIGHSMITH, PATRICIA: Day of Reckoning — Sept. 49
HOCH, EDWARD D.: The Theft of the Legal Eagle — July 145
Captain Leopold and the Ghost-Killer — Aug. 145
Interpol: The Case of the Lapidated Man — Sept. 144
The Credit Card Caper — Oct. 122
The Spy and the Talking House — Nov. 144
The Problem of the Covered Bridge — Dec. 140
HOLDING, JAMES: The Photographer and the Jockey — Aug. 106
INNES, MICHAEL: A Matter of Disturbing Incidents — Nov. 20
KEATING, H. R. F.: Torture Chamber — Sept. 125
KELLEY, EDITH SUMMERS: Guest in the House — July 72
KERSH, GERALD: The Scene of the Crime — Aug. 100
LAYMON, RICHARD: Roadside Pickup — Dec. 60
MACDONALD, ROSS: The Sinister Habit — Sept. 90
MARSH, NGAIO: A Fool About Money — Dec. 114
MASUR, HAROLD Q.: The $1,000,000 Disappearing Act — Aug. 128
MCNIVEN, JULIA: Death at Devil's Hole — July 95
MORROW, S.: Hard Times — Dec. 139
MOULDING, PETER: Killing by Inches — Sept. 83
NEVINS, JR., FRANCIS M.: The Scrabble Clue — July 138
The Ironclad Alibi — Nov. 72
OLSON, DONALD: Screams and Echoes — Aug. 6
The Intricate Pattern — Nov. 3
O'SPELIN, MACLEAN: Kukazi the Entertainer — Sept. 13
Department of Problems Resolved — Dec. 4
PARRY, HENRY T.: Depreciation Allowance — Aug. 7
PEIRCE, J. F.: The Hideous Highwayman — Aug. 4
PENTECOST, HUGH: They'll Kill the Lady — Aug.
Jericho and the Frightened Woman — Nov.
PEROWNE, BARRY: The Raffles Special — July 4
The Raffles Bombshell — Oct. 9
PIERCE, JOHN: The World's Softest Touch — July 12
Walking Hubert Down — Dec. 7
POE, EDGAR ALLAN: The Man of the Crowd — Nov. 8
POWELL, JAMES: The Oubliette Cipher — Nov. 12
RAFFERTY, S. S.: Right On, Chick! — July 3
Show 'em, Chick! — Sept. 3
Captain Cork's Second Case — Nov. 4
RENDELL, RUTH: The Fallen Curtain — Aug. 2
A Spot of Folly — Nov. 13
SLESAR, HENRY: The Memory Expert — Aug. 11
SMITH, KAY NOLTE: Reflected Glory — July 10
Theory of the Crime — July 11
SNYDER, ROBERTA: Performance Piece — Oct. 6
SPEED, JANE: Recipe for Revenge — Oct. 3
SPIRN, MICHELE: Murder in the Pantry — Dec. 10
STOUT, REX: The Gun Puzzle — Oct. 6
TOMLINSON, GERALD: Six Grooves of Left Twist — Oct. 8
TREAT, LAWRENCE: In Vino Veritas — Oct. 11
WITHE, STANLEY F.: The Diamond Killer — Nov. 10

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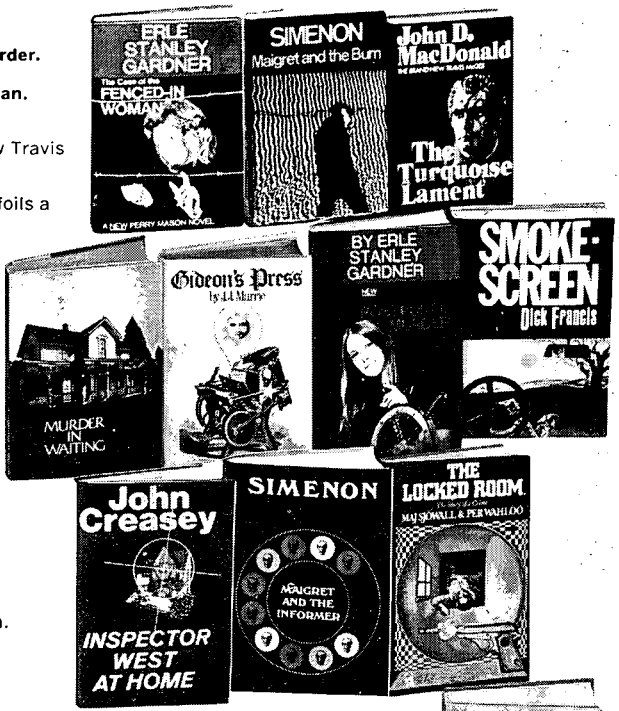

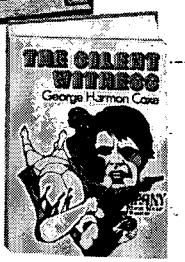

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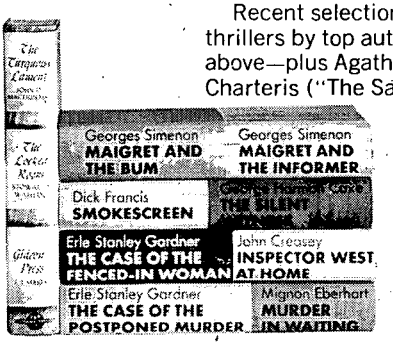

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